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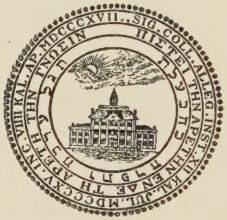

Allegheny College

WITHDRAWN

An Eighteenth-Century Gentleman and other Essays

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An Eighteenth-Century Gentleman and other Essays

BY

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PREFACE

THE central figure of this little volume is Samuel Johnson; and although the essays on Lyttelton and Macaulay are in form detached, each of them has some bearing upon the interpretation of that eighteenth-century spirit of which Johnson was the supreme embodiment.

An Eighteenth-Century Gentleman and *Johnson's Books* have appeared in *The London Mercury*, but have now been revised and expanded; *Johnson in Grub Street* was printed in *The Cornhill Magazine*, *Two Imitations* in *The Cambridge Review*, and *Lord Macaulay* as an English Association pamphlet; *The Focus of the Lichfield Lamps* is the substance of a presidential address given in September last to the Johnson Society.

To Mr L. F. Powell's kindly offer of proof-reading I owe several valuable corrections and additions.

S. C. R.

19 *December* 1929

I

AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GENTLEMAN

AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GENTLEMAN

THE history of a Lyttelton must inevitably be the history of an English gentleman, and it is fitting that the Christian name of the first Lord Lyttelton should be that of England's patron saint. George, the eldest of the twelve children of Sir Thomas Lyttelton, was born in the same year (1709) as Samuel Johnson, who lived to round off *The Lives of the Poets* with a frigid account of his contemporary's achievement—an account based, as Johnson said, "on a desire to avoid offence".

The summarised record of the careers of George Lyttelton's brothers might in itself be taken as a microcosm of eighteenth-century society; to modern ears it sounds like nothing so much as the first chapter of a novel by Thackeray.

There was Charles, successively Dean of Exeter, Bishop of Carlisle and President of the Society of Antiquaries; there was Richard (afterwards Sir Richard), aide-de-camp to the Earl of Stair at the battle of Dettingen and afterwards Master of the Jewel Office, Commander-in-Chief at Minorca and Governor of Guernsey (very fittingly he married Rachael, daughter of Wriothesley, second Duke of Bedford, and relict of Scroop, first Duke of Bridgewater); there was William Henry, successively Governor of South Carolina and Jamaica and ambassador at Lisbon; and even Thomas, who

died young, was a page of honour to Princess Anne.

George Lyttelton's education—Eton and Christ Church—contains no surprises. Of his Eton verses (and even Johnson admits that they were so much distinguished as to be recommended as models to his schoolfellows) one rather remarkable example survives. It is the *Soliloquy of a Beauty in the Country* and the manner is, of course, the manner of Mr Pope:

Ah, what avails it to be young and fair,
To move with negligence—to dress with care?
What worth have all the charms our pride can boast
If all in envious solitude be lost?
Where none admire, 'tis useless to excell;
Where none are beaux, 'tis vain to be a belle.

* * * * * *

How has my conscious heart with triumph glowed!
How have my sparkling eyes their transport showed,
At each distinguished *birth-night* ball to see
The homage due to *Empire* paid to *me*!

* * * * * *

In stupid indolence my life is spent
Supinely calm and dully innocent:
Unblest I wear my useless time away:
Sleep (wretched maid) all night and dream all day;
Go at set hours to dinner and to prayer;
For dullness ever must be regular.
Now with mamma at tedious whist I play;
Now without scandal drink insipid tea
Or in the garden breathe the country air,
Secure from meeting any tempter there;
From books to work, from work to books, I rove,
And am (alas!) at leisure to improve!
Is this the life a Beauty ought to lead?
Were eyes so radiant only made to read?

* * * * * *

Lyttelton left Oxford early and, at his father's behest, set out upon the Grand Tour. He gave his parents little cause for anxiety. Writing to his father from Calais, he says:

> In reply to your long discourse, I only beg leave to say, that there is a certain degree of folly in youth which I have never yet exceeded, and beyond which I desire no pardon. I hope my dear mother has dried her tears.

And, in a later epistle, Lyttelton again re-assures his father:

> I shall observe your caution against grapes, new wine, and pretty women; though they are all very tempting but dangerous.

At Luneville Lyttelton is bored by the universal passion for gambling and finds that the character of a man of learning is despised; he is caught by a man of quality reading a Latin author and is contemptuously asked whether he is designed for the Church; worst of all, he is doomed, as he says, to converse with a set of Englishmen who are even more ignorant than the French—all except Lord ——, but he unfortunately is scandalously debauched in principles as well as in practice.

Mr Poyntz, Lyttelton's companion, had but two criticisms to make to Sir Thomas. One was of George's studiousness:

> He cannot fail of making you and himself happy, and of being a great ornament to our country, if, with that refined taste and delicacy of genius, he can but recall his mind, at a proper age, from the pleasures of learning and gay scenes of imagination, to the dull road and fatigue of business.

The other was of George's digestion:

His health is liable to frequent interruptions, though not dangerous ones, nor of any long continuance. They seem to proceed chiefly from an ill digestion, which, I believe, may sometimes be occasioned by the vivacity of his imagination's pursuing some agreeable thought too intensely and diverting the spirits from their proper function, even at meals.

However, not all George Lyttelton's letters are about himself. There is an entertaining anecdote of the romantic life of the King of Spain (Philip V):

I hope [he writes from Paris] that his Catholick majesty will behave himself a little like a king, since the queen will have him be one in spite of his teeth. About 3 months ago, she caught him going downstairs at midnight, to abdicate, in his night-gown. He was so incensed at the surprise and disappointment that he beat her cruelly and would have strangled her if she had not called for help.

There is a certain historical interest, too, in Lyttelton's view of the social condition of France in 1728:

The abject slavery they are in, the number of hands that are employed in the military service, the swarms of idle ecclesiastics, and above all the chimerical distinction between a gentleman and a merchant, will always keep their traffick low; and the country will continue in the poverty I see now, which is more miserable than I could ever have imagined.

Lyttelton found time in the course of travel for poetry, as a gentleman should. His friend and counsellor Samuel Poyntz was the English representative at the Congress of Soissons in 1728

and is eulogised as the statesman who, in the interests of duty, spurns the temptation to retire to the calm of academic groves:

O thou, whose friendship is my joy and pride,
Whose virtues warm me, and whose precepts guide;
Thou, to whom greatness, rightly understood,
Is but a larger power of being good;
Say, Poyntz, amidst the toil of anxious state
Does not thy secret soul desire retreat?

* * * * * *

At Virgil's tomb Lyttelton bethought him of Mr Pope, and even dared to employ the Mantuan's shade to give the author of the *Dunciad* some lofty advice as to the proper use of his poetic talent:

Stranger, he said, whose pious hand has paid
These grateful rites to my attentive shade,
When thou shalt breathe thy happy native air,
To Pope this message from his master bear:

Great bard, whose numbers I myself inspire,
To whom I gave my own harmonious lyre,
If, high exalted on the throne of wit,
Near me and Homer thou aspire to sit,
No more let meaner satire dim the rays
That flow majestick from thy nobler bays;
In all the flowery paths of Pindus stray,
But shun that thorny, that unpleasing way;
Nor, when each soft engaging Muse is thine,
Address the least attractive of the Nine.

Several other poetical epistles belong to this period of Lyttelton's career. Of these pieces Johnson says, with characteristic good sense, that "they have a smooth equability which cannot much tire, because they are short, but which seldom elevates

or surprises". From this general criticism however he excepts the *Advice to Belinda*:

> Be good yourself, nor think another's shame
> Can raise your merit, or adorn your fame.
> Prudes rail at whores, as statesmen in disgrace
> At ministers, because they wish their place.

There we have lines redolent of the century of Pope and Swift, of Fielding and Smollett. But in a moment we come to this:

> Seek to be good, but aim not to be great,
> A woman's noblest station is retreat.

It is the pen of George Lyttelton, but the voice is the voice of Charles Kingsley.

It was as inevitable that Lyttelton should enter into political life as that he should have proceeded upon the Grand Tour. Even before he entered Parliament, the Prince of Wales, who was raising a standard of opposition to Walpole's ministry, chose Lyttelton as his confidential adviser; and when he was returned as member for Okehampton in 1735, he quickly rose to prominence amongst the young patriots who arrayed themselves against the domination of Walpole.

> For many years [says Johnson] the name of George Lyttelton was seen in every account of every debate in the House. He opposed the standing army—he opposed the Excise—he supported the motion for the removal of Walpole. His zeal was considered by the courtiers as not only violent, but acrimonious and malignant.

By the year 1738 we find Lyttelton to be of sufficient importance to be the subject of inveterate

abuse in newspapers which are alleged to have been in the pay of the government. In 1741 he attained to still higher political distinction, being a prominent figure in a cartoon entitled "The Motion", very famous in its day and still familiar to students of the history of caricature. Lyttelton appears as a grotesquely lank horseman with the following verse beneath:

> Who's dat who ride astride de poney,
> So long, so lank, so lean, and bony?
> Oh! he be the great orator, Little-Toney!

When Walpole finally fell in 1742, Lyttelton remained in opposition with other discontented Whigs including Pitt and Bubb Doddington, and it was not until 1744 that he took office as a lord of the treasury under Henry Pelham.

The personality of Lyttelton offered plentiful material for literary, as well as pictorial, caricature; according to Birkbeck Hill[1], he was Chesterfield's "respectable Hottentot" and Horace Walpole wrote:

> Absurdity was predominant in Lyttelton's composition: it entered equally into his politics, his apologies, his public pretences, his private conversations. With the figure of a spectre and the gesticulations of a puppet, he talked heroics through his nose, made declamations at a visit, and played cards with scraps of history or sentences of Pindar. He had set out on a poetical love plan, though with nothing of a lover but absence of mind and nothing of a poet but absence of meaning. Yet he was far from wanting parts; spoke

[1] Boswell's *Life* I, 267 and *Dr Johnson: His Friends and Critics*, pp. 214 ff.

well when he had studied his speeches and loved to reward and promote merit in others.

Lyttelton was now closely enmeshed in politics. He was nearly related to the Cobhams and the Pitts and this Cobhamite group was popularly known as the "cousinhood". At a later stage, however, Lyttelton broke with Pitt and accepted office in 1754 as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Here was more fun for Horace Walpole:

> Had they dragged Dr Halley from his observatory to make him Vice-Chamberlain or Dr Hales from his ventilators to act Bayes in the Rehearsal, the choice would have been as judicious: they turned an absent poet to the management of the revenue, and employed a man as visionary as Don Quixote to combat Demosthenes.

When Pitt's turn came in 1756, Lyttelton was dismissed from office. His political career ended fittingly in the Augustan calm of the House of Lords.

Before he became prominent in politics, Lyttelton was already known as a poet. Besides the early poems which have been already quoted he published in 1732 a composition entitled *The Progress of Love*, in four eclogues, and the *Persian Letters* were also begun at a very early age. To the year 1747 belong two more intimate works. At the age of 32 Lyttelton had married Lucy Fortescue. This lady, as we should expect, was the ornament and joy of her husband's life. In Lyttelton's own words:

> He, only he, can tell, who, match'd like me,
> (If such another happy man there be)
> Has by his own experience tried
> How much the wife is dearer than the bride.

But as Johnson curtly remarks, "Human pleasures are short; she died in childbed about five years afterwards and he [Lyttelton] solaced his grief by writing a long poem to her memory". Johnson's reference is to the once celebrated monody, now known only by the conventionally chilly comments of the historians of literature. Nevertheless, it is in itself a monument of eighteenth-century domesticity and it received genuine praise for its elegiac tenderness from no less an authority than Thomas Gray:

O shades of Hagley, where is now your boast?
Your bright inhabitant is lost.
You she preferred to all the gay resorts
Where female vanity might wish to shine,
The pomp of cities, and the pride of courts.
Her modest beauties shunned the publick eye:
To your sequestered dales
And flower-embroidered vales
From an admiring world she chose to fly:
With Nature there retir'd, and Nature's God,
The silent paths of wisdom trod,
And banish'd every passion from her breast,
But those, the gentlest and the best,
Whose holy flames with energy divine
The virtuous heart enliven and improve,
The conjugal and the maternal love.

And again:

O fatal, fatal stroke,
That all this pleasing fabrick Love had rais'd
Of rare felicity,
On which e'en wanton Vice with envy gaz'd,
And every scheme of bliss our hearts had form'd
With soothing hope, for many a future day,
In one sad moment broke—

Yet, O my soul, thy rising murmurs stay;
Nor dare th'all-wise Disposer to arraign,
  Or against his supreme decree
  With impious grief complain.
That all thy full-blown joys at once should fade,
Was his most righteous will—and be that will obey'd.

Lyttelton made a characteristic excursion into theological literature. Having "in the pride of Juvenile confidence, with the help of corrupt conversation, entertained doubts of the truth of Christianity", he afterwards re-established his convictions and published a work entitled *Observations on the Conversion of St Paul* (1747). Lyttelton's method of apologetic is worth noting. Either, he says, Paul must have been an impostor, who said what he knew to be false; or he was an enthusiast who by the force of an overheated imagination imposed on himself; or he was deceived by others; or what he says about his conversion did really happen and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation. Theology apart, one definition is worth quoting: "Now these are the ingredients of which enthusiasm is generally composed; great heat of temper, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity or self-conceit".

This is an admirably clear exposition of the eighteenth-century point of view. Enthusiasm today is catalogued among the virtues, especially if it be so strong as to outlive youth. It connotes a certain temperamental ardour, an eagerness for fresh experience, a belief in the value of life. The common text-book *cliché* about the eighteenth-

century mistrust of enthusiasm is based on a confusion of meanings. It did not suppress the spirit of courage and of adventure: it even felt wistfully towards the spirit of romance. Fielding was called an enthusiast for righteousness. Boswell, in the modern sense of the word, was one of the greatest enthusiasts in history.

Lyttelton's *Persian Letters* were, as Johnson is careful to emphasise, the work of a very young man. They have, he says, "something of that indistinct and headstrong ardour for liberty which a man of genius always catches when he enters the world and always suffers to cool as he passes forward". It was not really the precocity which Johnson hated; it was the Whiggishness of the precocity. In form, the *Letters* are a fairly close imitation of Montesquieu; and granted that they thereby lose something of spontaneity, granted that they do not come under the category of the Hundred Best Books, they still remain a considerable achievement for a boy in the early twenties—indeed, though they were not published until 1735, it appears from a letter written by Lyttelton to his father that the writing of them was begun some seven years before. There are plenty of dull pages in them, though on the other hand, as Lyttelton's Victorian biographer is careful to point out, the letters "are not without occasional indelicacy both of thought and expression". But if they are nothing else, the letters are interesting as giving the Whig moralist's view of the social

conditions of the time. Had Lyttelton lived a century earlier he might well have been prominent amongst the character-writers. Here, for instance, is his picture of the Discharged Soldier:

As I was walking in the fields near this city the other morning, a disbanded soldier, somewhat in years, implored my charity, and, to excite my compassion, bared his bosom on which were the scars of many wounds all received in the service of his country. I gladly relieved his wants and being desirous to inform myself of everything fell into discourse with him on the war in which he had served. He told me he had been present at the taking of 10 or 12 strong towns and had a share in the dangers and glory of almost as many victories. How then, said I, comes it to pass that thou art laid aside? Thy strength is indeed in its decline but not yet wasted and I should think that experience would well supply the loss of youth. "Alas Sir," answered he, "I have a good heart and tolerable limbs but I want 3 inches more of stature. I am brave and able enough, thank God, but not quite handsome enough for a soldier." "How then didst thou serve so long?" returned I. "In Flanders, Sir," said he, "there were some thousands such ill-looking fellows who did very well in a day of battle but would make no figure at a review. Besides I have no vote for any county, city or borough in England and therefore could not hope for preferment in the Army were I ever so well made."

Many of the letters are devoted, like those in Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, to a satirical review of fashionable follies. Though the delicate charm of Goldsmith is lacking, Lyttelton has a certain austere humour: Selim, the supposed Persian visitor, is bored by the opera. He finds it

very far from inflaming him to a spirit of faction and much more likely to lay him asleep. "Ours in Persia", he says, "sets us all a-dancing; but I am quite unmoved with this." "Do but *fancy* it *moving*", replies his friend, "and you will soon be moved as much as others. It is a trick you may learn when you will, with a little pains: we have most of us learnt it in our turns."

But Lyttelton is not merely the social satirist—he quickly reveals the spirit of the humanitarian reformer as well: bear-gardens, debtors' prisons, gaming-houses, mercenary marriages, political corruption—all these are treated with an ethical solemnity far removed from that spirit of detachment which is the mark of the true essayist.

However, Selim is not exclusively concerned with morality and moral issues; Lyttelton employs him to express a sturdy English contempt for new-fangled Italian ideas, whether imported into architecture or cooking:

> I went yesterday with one of my acquaintance to see a friend of his, who has a house about 20 miles from London. He had formerly been a citizen and tradesman, but growing rich on a sudden by some lucky hit in the more profitable trade of stock-jobbing, he as suddenly set up for a judge in architecture, painting and all the arts which men of quality would be thought to understand, and built this house as a specimen of his learning. When we came in, though it was in the midst of winter, we were carried into a room without a fire-place; and which *looked*, if possible, still colder than it *felt*. I suppose, said I, this *stone-vault* that we are in is designed to be *the burying-place* of the family:

but I should be glad to see the rooms in which they *live*; for the chillness of these walls is insupportable to a Persian constitution. I see, said my companion, that you have no taste, or else you could not be cold in a *saloon* so *beautiful* as this....

At length we ended our observations and sat down to dinner in a room where, by good fortune, the rules of architecture allowed us to be warm; but when the meat was served I was in great confusion not to know how to ask for any dish of all I saw before me; for it seems the gentleman ate in the *French way*, and nothing came up to his table in its natural form....

Taken as a whole, the *Persian Letters* are thoroughly eighteenth-century and thoroughly English—ethical, didactic, insular. But there is one fragment of character-etching whose lines have lost nothing of their definition in the lapse of centuries:

There is a sett of people in this country, whose activity is more useless than the idleness of a monk. They are like those troublesome dreams, which often agitate and perplex us in our sleep, but leave no impression behind them when we wake. I have sent thee an epitaph made for one of these *men of business*, who ended his life and labours not long ago:

Here lies ——, who lived threescore and ten years in a continual hurry. He had the honour of sitting in six parliaments, of being chairman in 25 committees, and of making 350 speeches. He attended constantly twice a week at the levees of 12 different ministers of state; and writ for and against them one thousand papers. He composed fifty new projects for the better government of the church and state. He left behind him memoirs of his own life in five volumes in folio.

Reader, if thou shouldst be moved to drop a tear for the loss of so CONSIDERABLE A PERSON, it will be a

SINGULAR favour to the deceased; for nobody else concerns himself about it, or remembers that such a man was ever born.

The "sound business man" is always with us and upon him Lyttelton has said the last word.

It is characteristic of Lyttelton's literary quality that his two most considerable prose works were frankly works of imitation. He was a well-read gentleman and could wield a fluent pen; but of creative imagination he had nothing. Like every good Whig, he aspired towards better things; of originality he was suspicious. So, in his preface to the *Dialogues of the Dead* he writes in the true eighteenth-century manner:

> Lucian among the ancients and among the moderns Fenelon archbishop of Cambray and Monsieur Fontenelle have written *Dialogues of the Dead* with a general applause.... And sometimes a new dress may render *an old truth* more pleasing to those whom the mere love of novelty betrays into error.... Indeed one of the best services, that could now be done to mankind by any good writer, would be the bringing them back to *common sense*; from which the desire of shining by extraordinary notions has seduced great numbers, to the no small detriment of morality, and of all real knowledge.

So, through all Lyttelton's *Dialogues* there runs the solemn strain of a conscientious Whiggism: Falkland and Hampden agree that what each of them wanted was peace and constitutional liberty; Fenelon feels that both he and Plato would have done better to avoid those subjects in which

sentiment took the place of reason; "Shall I," says Ulysses to Circe, "give up her [Penelope's] society for the brutal joys of sensual life, keeping indeed the form of a man, but having lost the human soul, or at least all its noble and godlike powers? Oh! Circe, it is impossible; I cannot bear the thought." Duelling is held up to ridicule in a dialogue between an English duellist and a North American savage; religious fanaticism is similarly deplored in a conversation between Fernando Cortez and William Penn; and Mrs Modish is reproachfully told by Mercury that she has wasted her time, faded her beauty, and destroyed her health for the laudable purposes of contradicting her husband and being that something and that nothing called the *bon ton*.

One dialogue, in which a somewhat lighter touch is evident, is between M. Apicius, the classical prototype of epicures, and Charles Darteneuf. Here again, poor Lyttelton was not quite original. Darteneuf, a friend of Swift (in whose *Journal to Stella* his name often occurs), a contributor to the *Tatler*, a member of the Kitcat Club and the employer of Robert Dodsley in his footman days, had already been celebrated in more than one couplet by Pope:

> Each mortal has his pleasure: none deny
> Scarsdale his bottle, Darty his ham-pye.

"I am sorry for you," says Darteneuf to Apicius, "very sorry: for if you never were in Britain, you never eat the best oysters."

A. Pardon me, Sir; your Sandwich oysters were brought to Rome in my time.

D. They could not be fresh: they were good for nothing there. You should have come to Sandwich to eat them. It is a shame for you that you did not.

An epicure talk of danger when he is in search of a dainty! Did not Leander swim over the Hellespont in a tempest, to get to his mistress? and what is a wench to a barrel of exquisite oysters?

Later in the dialogue Darteneuf twits Apicius with the inferiority of the wines of ancient times—wines that were boiled and mixed with water. Apicius admits the superiority of the modern vintages and adds: "Wonderful things have been also said to me of an English liquor called punch". "Ay," replies Darteneuf, "to have died without tasting *that*, is miserable indeed."

But, from the point of view of the study of Lyttelton, the most interesting part of the dialogue is the last page. There Mercury astonishes both epicures by declaring that he knows two men (one of ancient, one of modern times) who had gained more pleasure from eating than either Apicius or Darteneuf. Apicius conjectures that the reference must be to a Sybarite and to a Frenchman in the West Indies.

No, [replies Mercury] one was a Spartan soldier, and the other an English farmer.... Labour and hunger gave a relish to the *black broth* of the former and the *salt beef* of the latter, beyond what you ever found in the *tripotanums* or *ham pyes* that vainly stimulated your forced and languid appetities which perpetual indolence weakened and constant luxury overcharged.

Thus is a pleasantly frivolous dialogue reduced, in the end, to the level of a cautionary tale.

Lyttelton's immortality, like his own literary inspiration, is largely borrowed. His works are unread, his biography unreadable; yet no one can approach the literature of the eighteenth century without meeting his name. At an early stage of his career he became a patron of literature and much might be written of his friendship with Shenstone and James Thomson. But the most famous of his protégés was Henry Fielding. Fielding and Lyttelton were at school together and their friendship was true and lasting. The dedication of *Tom Jones* to Lyttelton was no merely formal compliment. It was Lyttelton who suggested the writing of the book and it was at a party in the country, of which Pitt and Lyttelton were members, that the novel was first read in manuscript. Unfortunately there was no Boswell present to record the comments made. Fielding's dedication is perhaps the best, and certainly—even when allowances are made for the hyperbole inevitable in such compositions—the most permanent, tribute to the character of George Lyttelton. There is real gratitude in it, for Fielding had received real benefits; and there is one paragraph in particular which has a special significance in relation to Lyttelton the moralist:

> From the name of my patron, indeed, I hope my reader will be convinced, at his very entrance on this work, that he will find in the whole course of it nothing prejudicial to the cause of Religion and Virtue; nothing inconsistent with the strictest rules of decency, nor

which can offend even the chastest eye in the perusal. On the contrary, I declare, that to recommend Goodness and Innocence hath been my sincere endeavour in this history.

Here is a familiar and highly characteristic passage in relation not only to Lyttelton but to the essentially moral outlook of the eighteenth century. One sentence in it is too much for Lyttelton's early Victorian biographer, who italicises the following sentence: "*Nothing inconsistent with the strictest rules of decency, nor which can offend even the chastest eye in the perusal*", and adds:

It is impossible to read without astonishment the lines printed in italics. Few, if any, would now be found to deny that it has required all the extraordinary powers displayed in this work...to prevent its entire condemnation on the ground of grossness of incident and indecency of expression. These are notoriously the causes why it is now often unread by men and scarcely ever read by women....That its tendency is less mischievous than almost every French and some English novels of the present day may be admitted: still, that such a work, with such a preface, should have been dedicated to such a patron, is no inconsiderable proof of the advance in refinement, and of the public homage paid to decency, of the age in which we live.

Robert Phillimore, late student of Christ Church, was in those words writing truer than he knew. Morality, sense of duty, respectability, domesticity, these were neither the invention nor the prerogative of the Victorian Age[1]. The outlook of George Lyttelton (the Good Lord Lyttelton) upon the world was, indeed, tinged with the ethical

[1] See pp. 107, 108.

respectability which is commonly associated with the Victorians. For the life of the eighteenth-century gentleman was not merely one of clubs and coffee-houses; of gaiety at Vauxhall and intrigue at Bath; of political cynicism and clerical atrophy. These elements were there, but over against them was a stout bulwark of morality. Johnson was the Great Moralist before he was the Great Lexicographer; his one really popular work—*Rasselas*—was a succession of melancholy moralisings. Boswell himself, rake as he was, took an essentially moral view of art and life; to him, as to his contemporaries, it was natural to commend a poem for its "elevating" sentiments, to praise an essay for its "edifying" reflections.

Of this eighteenth-century spirit George Lyttelton is perhaps the most striking embodiment. From the beginning he had an interest—an intelligent interest—in religion, in literature, in politics. He is equipped to take his proper part in these activities by the training proper to an English gentleman—Eton, Christ Church, facility in versification, the Grand Tour with its observation of political conditions abroad, entry into Parliament, marriage, and the establishment of a country seat. Thus is the world of English public life laid open to him and throughout Lyttelton's life, private as well as public, there runs the sense of duty. Perhaps this sense is keener because Lyttelton is spiritually, as well as politically, a Whig—not that Whigs are necessarily more dutiful or

more virtuous than Tories, but because Whigs have a feeling that they should be "up and doing", so to speak, safeguarding this liberty or reforming that abuse; Tories, on the other hand, tend, or used to tend, to "let it alone".

> An English nobleman [says Lyttelton in one of the *Persian Letters*] should be a strenuous assertor of the privileges of the people, because he is perpetually entrusted with the care of them; and, at the same time, desirous to preserve the just rights of the crown, because it is the source from which his honour is derived. He should have an estate that might set him above dependence; and employ the superfluities, if such there were, not in improving luxury, but in extending charity. He should make his dignity easy to his inferiors by the modesty and simplicity of his behaviour; nor ever think himself too great for the lowest offices of friendship and humanity. He should claim no privilege that might exempt him from the strictest rules of justice; and afford his protection not to men obnoxious to the law, but to every modest virtue and useful art.

Add to this picture of the idealised Whig a real enthusiasm for literature, a certain power of oratory and a genuine piety, and you have the Good Lord Lyttelton. Awkward, angular and—it is to be feared—lacking a sense of humour, he fell short of greatness and came perilously near to being a prig. To read his works is to experience the sensation of a curious blend of Horace Walpole and the Prince Consort.

II

JOHNSONIANA

Johnson in Grub Street
Johnson's Books
The Focus of the Lichfield Lamps
Two Imitations

JOHNSON IN GRUB STREET

Grub Street is one of that group of place-names which remain in literary currency long after their topographical significance has vanished.

Johnson, though he deemed himself to be more competent than anyone else to write a history of Grub Street, confessed to Miss Burney that he had never visited the locality; and, without consulting Birkbeck Hill or some other work of reference, few Johnsonians, and still fewer topographers, would be able to mark its position on an eighteenth-century map of London. It was, in fact, situated between Fore Street (near Cripplegate) and Chiswell Street.

But this essay is not concerned with topography, and for the modern reader the associations of the words "Grub Street" are purely literary. At once they recall to him Goldsmith:

> The morn was cold, he views with keen desire
> The rusty grate unconscious of a fire:
> With beer and milk arrears the frieze was scored,
> And five crack'd teacups dress'd the chimney board:
> A nightcap decked his brows instead of bay,
> A cap by night—a stocking all the day.

Or Johnson himself:

> Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes
> And pause awhile from letters, to be wise;
> There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
> Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.

Or Fielding:

Bookweight. Fie upon it, gentlemen! What, not at your pens? Do you consider, Mr Quibble, that it is a fortnight since your Letter to a Friend in the Country was published? Is it not high time for an Answer to come out? At this rate, before your Answer is printed, your Letter will be forgot. I love to keep a controversy up warm. I have had authors who have writ a pamphlet in the morning, answered it in the afternoon, and answered that again at night.

Quibble. I will be as expeditious as possible: but it is harder to write on this side the question, because it is the wrong side.

Bookweight. Not a jot. So far on the contrary, that I have known some authors choose it as the properest to show their genius.... Let it be finished with all speed. Well, Mr Dash, have you done that murder yet?

Dash. Yes, sir, the murder is done; I am only about a few moral reflections to place before it.

Bookweight. Very well: then let me have the ghost finished by this day se'nnight.

Dash. What sort of a ghost would you have this, sir? The last was a pale one.

Bookweight. Then let this be a bloody one.... So, Mr Index, what news with you?

Index. I have brought my bill, sir.

Bookweight. What's here? For fitting the motto of *Risum teneatis Amici* to a dozen pamphlets, at sixpence each, six shillings; for *Omnia vincit Amor et nos cedamus Amori*, sixpence; for *Difficile est Satyram non scribere*, sixpence. Hum! hum! hum! sum total for thirty-six Latin mottoes, eighteen shillings; ditto English, one shilling and ninepence; ditto Greek four—four shillings. These Greek mottoes are excessively dear.

Index. If you have them cheaper at either of the universities, I will give you mine for nothing.

Or again, the phrase may bring with it a recollection of Pendennis' early days in London—a Grub Street softened and sweetened with essence of early Victorian sentiment:

"Now boy, here's a chance for you. Turn me off a copy of verses to this."

"What's this. A Church Porch—A lady entering it, and a youth out of a wine-shop window ogling her—What the deuce am I to do with it?"

"Try", said Warrington. "Earn your livelihood for once, you who so long to do it."

"Well, I will try", said Pen.

"And I'll go out to dinner", said Warrington.

When Warrington came home that night, at a very late hour, the verses were done. "There they are," said Pen, "I've screwed 'em out at last. I think they'll do."

"I think they will", said Warrington.

(Shortly afterwards the verses are accepted by Mr Bacon who gives Pen a cheque.)

"Thank God! thank God!" cried Arthur. "I needn't be a charge upon the old mother. I can pay off Laura now. I can get my own living. I can made my own way."

"I can marry the Grand Vizier's daughter: I can purchase a house in Belgrave Square: I can build a fine castle in the air!" said Warrington, pleased with the other's exultation. "Well, you may get bread and cheese, Pen: and I own it tastes well, the bread which you earn yourself."

This is Grub Street as seen from the bow-window of a club in St James's Street. We are spiritually nearer to the early life of Samuel Johnson in that saddest of all novels which deal with the career of letters—George Gissing's *New Grub Street*, a moving

tale, terrible in its reality, of the Vanity of Literary Wishes. It is not surprising to find Johnson quoted more than once in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, and the Grub Street pictured in that book is the Grub Street which Johnson knew:

I see that alley hidden on the west side of Tottenham Court Road, where, after living in a back bedroom on the top floor, I had to exchange for the front cellar; there was a difference, if I remember rightly, of sixpence a week, and sixpence, in those days, was a very great consideration—why, it meant a couple of meals. . . . The front cellar was stone-floored; its furniture was a table, a chair, a wash-stand, and a bed; the window, which of course had never been cleaned since it was put in, received light through a flat grating in the alley above. Here I lived; here I *wrote*. Yes, "literary work" was done at that filthy deal table, on which, by-the-bye, lay my Homer, my Shakespeare, and the few other books I then possessed. . . .

Then follows a passage which would have seemed less familiar to Johnson:

I recall a tragi-comical incident of life at the British Museum. Once, on going down into the lavatory to wash my hands, I became aware of a notice newly set up above the row of basins. It ran somehow thus: "Readers are requested to bear in mind that these basins are to be used only for casual ablutions". Oh, the significance of that description! Had I not myself, more than once, been glad to use this soap and water more largely than the sense of the authorities contemplated? And there were poor fellows working under the great dome, whose need, in this respect, was greater than mine. I laughed heartily at the notice, but it meant so much.

"Sir," we may imagine Johnson's comment

might have been, "if an ablution be not casual, I suspect it to be superfluous."

But apart from the later associations of the phrase, Johnson, on his arrival in London in 1737, was brought into direct contact with the name of Grub Street. It was a name, indeed, of fairly disreputable antiquity and was said to have been associated first with certain

> Literary Guides who, for the cheapness and obscurity of lodgings, resided in Grub-street, in the seditious times of King Charles I and from these garrets and cellars dispersed those false reports and reasonings, which were very instrumental in stirring up the people at last to a rebellion. And though some of those original Grubeans made themselves most remarkably infamous for want of integrity, by wilfully publishing what they knew to be false; yet many of them showed as great a deficiency in parts and learning by writeing in a very low manner, adapted only to the taste of the vulgar. From these genuine productions of Grub-street the same appellation has been by degrees extended to all Pieces of the like nature in which bad matter has been expressed in a bad manner, in what soil soever they have been produced.

Such is the explanation given in the Preface to the *Memoirs of the Society of Grub-street,* published in the very year of Johnson's entry into the literary underworld of London. These *Memoirs* contain a selection of the papers which had appeared in *The Grub-street Journal,* founded in 1730 and principally designed to pour ridicule upon bad authors and their works. The promoters of the journal were themselves far removed from Grub Street hacks: John Martyn was a Fellow of the Royal Society,

an author of many medical and botanical works, a Virgilian commentator, and shortly to become Professor of Botany in the University of Cambridge; Richard Russell was a non-juring parson[1].

Martyn signed himself "Bavius"; Russell, "Maevius"; with their colleagues they met once a week at the Pegasus, a "real house in Grub Street", and based their claim to be competent editors on "a good fund of integrity" and "a competent stock of knowledge".

For some years *The Grub-street Journal* (of which the best papers may be read in the *Memoirs of the Society of Grub-street* published in 1737) had a good sale. But it was shortly confronted by a serious competitor, namely, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and it was through *The Gentleman's Magazine* that Samuel Johnson was first introduced to Grub Street.

In the first volume of *Johnson Club Papers* there is one written by the late A. W. Hutton, entitled "Dr Johnson and the *Gentleman's Magazine*". The main object of this very witty and delightful essay was to show that the bulk of the literary contributions to that journal are "only precious in the sense of being precious nonsense". There is, indeed, plentiful evidence in support of this, but the question is not strictly relevant to a review of Johnson's career as a literary adventurer in his earliest years in London. When he arrived with

[1] He had lost the living of Alfriston owing to his non-juring principles. See Hillhouse, *The Grub-street Journal* (1928), pp. 40–46.

twopence-halfpenny and a half-written tragedy in his pocket, Johnson was almost without a friend. He had an introduction to Mr Colson, a mathematical schoolmaster, but even Boswell has to confess that how he employed himself on his first coming to London is not particularly known.

> With little assistance of the learned and without any patronage of the great; not in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under the shelter of academick bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow.

The familiar words from the Preface to the *Dictionary* suggest in dignified and pathetic outline the picture of Johnson in Grub Street. That the detail of the picture is not perfectly filled in is not the fault of James Boswell. Boswell, who first met Johnson eight years after the publication of the *Dictionary*, was dependent upon others for the record of the Grub Street period, and those others had not the Boswellian gifts either of observation or description.

Still, we know certain facts. While still resident amongst the boobies of Birmingham, Johnson had become familiar with the newly founded *Gentleman's Magazine*, of which the first number appeared in 1731; and on November 25, 1734, he addressed a letter to Edward Cave in which he expressed the opinion that the public would appreciate the inclusion in the magazine of short literary dissertations in Latin or English in preference to low jests, awkward buffoonery and dull

scurrilities; at the same time indicating his own willingness to "undertake, on reasonable terms, sometimes to fill a column". It may be added that Johnson had been encouraged to regard Cave as a generously-minded editor by his recent offer of a prize of £50 for the best poem on "Life, Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell".

Though Cave acknowledged the letter, Johnson does not appear as a contributor to *The Gentleman's Magazine* until 1738, the year after his arrival in London. In the March number there appeared the ode *Ad Urbanum*, and in April a couplet addressed to Richard Savage. It is not without significance that Johnson's first two contributions to the most popular journal of the time were contributions written in Latin verse.

It is also characteristic that Sir John Hawkins (the man who might have written a real history of Johnson in Grub Street) feels it necessary to explain and justify at some length Johnson's decision to write for money:

> It evidently appears [he writes] that he had entertained a resolution to depend for a livelihood upon what he should be able, either in the way of original composition, or translation, or in editing the works of celebrated authors, to procure by his studies, and, in short, to become an author by profession; an occupation, which, though it may, in some views of it, be deemed mercenary, as adapting itself to particular occasions and conjunctures, nay, to the interests, passions and prejudices, and even humours of mankind, has yet some illustrious examples, at least in our times, to justify it. It is true that many persons dis-

tinguish between those writings which are the effect of a natural impulse of genius, and those other that owe their existence to interested motives, and, being the offspring of another parent, may, in some sense, be said to be illegitimate....

So writes Sir John in his heaviest manner of the alleged contrast between "literature for literature's sake" and "writing for bread". But Johnson soon disillusioned him:

Johnson [he goes on] knew of no such distinction and would never acquiesce in it when made by others; on the contrary, I have, more than once, heard him assert, that he knew of no genuine motive for writing, other than necessity.

Hawkins was so much astonished at this declaration of the Grub Street faith that he returned to the subject in a later part of his narrative. Few, he says, could be persuaded to yield to Johnson's frank assertion. Some apology is still necessary for it, and Hawkins justifies it on these grounds: Johnson's want of a profession, the pressure of his necessities, and the example of such predecessors as Fuller, Howell and Dryden.

It is worth noting that the first defence of Johnson is that of lack of a profession. Sir John Hawkins no doubt expresses the view of the eighteenth-century gentleman in regarding writing as a graceful *parergon* for the leisured hours of a clergyman, a statesman, a doctor or a lawyer. But literature as a profession—it was a contradiction in terms.

Johnson would indeed have admitted that his way of life, or rather of earning a living, was a *pis*

aller; he had failed as a schoolmaster, and the lack of a degree, as well as lack of money, debarred him from entering one of the learned professions. But with that magnificent realism which is one of his greatest qualities he faced the prospect of Grub Street without illusion and without a whine. Melancholy indeed was always at his side, but he knew himself for what he was—an unknown and impecunious adventurer in literature. He knew that fame would only come to him if he could contrive to please the public; he knew that the public would never hear of him unless he could contrive to please the editors and the booksellers, that is, the publishers; he knew that even after the public had begun to hear of him and to describe his first poem as the work of an author "even greater than Pope", he must still keep the wolf from the door by the daily routine of journalism; he knew that the booksellers were not to blame (they were, he said, generous, liberal-minded men), but when their whips cracked he must needs obey—"a child is whipp'd and gets his task and there's an end on't".

It is more fitting, then, to admire Johnson's courage in Grub Street than to grow sentimental in pity for the drudgery which was his lot.

Edward Cave, whose paper was rapidly gaining popularity and triumphing over its rivals, no doubt treated Johnson at first with an air of patronage.

> Meaning [as Hawkins says] to dazzle him with the splendour of some of those luminaries in literature who

favoured him with their correspondence, he told him that, if he would in the evening, be at a certain alehouse in the neighbourhood of Clerkenwell, he might have a chance of seeing Mr Browne and another or two of the persons mentioned....Johnson accepted the invitation; and being introduced by Cave, dressed in a loose horseman's coat, and such a great bushy uncombed wig as he constantly wore, to the sight of Mr Browne, whom he found sitting at the upper end of a long table, in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, had his curiosity gratified.

Moses Browne and the rest of Cave's lieutenants were indeed a curious party. Browne was the senior contributor. Originally a pencutter, he is said to have fed the magazine with "many a nourishing morsel". An editor of Izaak Walton, he displayed especial skill in piscatory eclogues. He had, moreover, religious tendencies and, having taken Holy Orders, published a devotional manual entitled *Sunday Thoughts*. Johnson read them "with cold approbation". He had a great mind, he said, to publish Monday Thoughts.

Amongst the rest of the company was Foster Webb, formerly a city clerk. Webb delighted in the composition of poetical enigmas, but being exhorted in the number of October 1740 to

Burst through the gloom and brighten into fame,

he transferred his talent to the translation of Ovid and Horace. He was, says Hawkins, "a modest, ingenious and sober young man; but a consumption defeated the hopes of his friends, and took him off in the twenty-second year of his age".

Other contributors were John Canton, who wrote mathematical papers and afterwards became a Fellow of the Royal Society; William Rider, a versifier who was later appointed Sur-master of St Paul's School; Adam Calamy, who wrote essays in polemical theology and republican politics over the signature "A Consistent Protestant". No record survives, alas, of any conversation between Johnson and this redoubtable controversialist who must surely have provoked Johnson to use the butt-end of his pistol; but there was a Calamy who bought four lots of books, including Warburton's Sermons, at the sale of Johnson's library in 1785.

How did Johnson fare in this company? Cave, says Hawkins in one terrible, damning sentence, "had no great relish for mirth, but he could bear it"; and though Johnson regarded his mental faculties as slow and more than once attempted to escape from the drudgery of authorship, he realised that so long as he was in Grub Street, the patronage of Edward Cave was the most serviceable he was likely to obtain. Accordingly he contributed a miscellany of epigrams, essays, prefaces and biographies. More bulky in content were the Parliamentary Debates for which Johnson shortly became solely responsible. These were written

> at those seasons when he was able to raise his imagination to such a pitch of fervour as bordered upon enthusiasm, which, that he might the better do, his practice was to shut himself up in a room assigned to him at St John's Gate, to which he would not suffer anyone to approach, except the compositor or Cave's

boy for matter, which, as fast as he composed it, he tumbled out at the door.

Here is a vivid illustration of the invalidity of the distinction between writing done for its own sake and writing done for a livelihood. That Johnson would never have undertaken this task of oratorical reconstruction but for *res angusta domi*, is indeed indisputable; but it is equally clear that once Johnson had begun his task, he was himself in the grip of an enthusiasm which lifted him above the level of the journalist with his columns to be filled, and brought out the brilliant rhetorical talent which is inherent in all Johnson's writings. It goes without saying that members of Parliament were flattered and delighted by the magnificence of the periods attributed to them. The speech, however, put into the mouth of Pitt beginning:

> Sir, the atrocious crime of being a young man, which the honourable gentleman has with such spirit and decency charged upon me, I shall neither attempt to palliate nor deny, but content myself with wishing that I may be one of those whose follies may cease with their youth, and not of that number who are ignorant in spite of experience.

was regarded as genuine. Many years later the speech was being discussed at a dinner party. Johnson astonished the company with the remark, "That speech I wrote in a garret in Exeter Street".

But *The Gentleman's Magazine* did not of course monopolise Johnson's productions in his Grub Street period. *London* (also written in the garret

in Exeter Street) was printed by Cave and published, anonymously, by Dodsley. There were satires, too, in prose as well as in verse—for instance *Marmor Norfolciense*. This showed strong Jacobite sympathies; according to one story, a warrant was issued for Johnson's arrest and he fled with his wife to a hidden lodging in Lambeth Marsh. Certainly the *Monthly Review* described it in later years as a "bloody Jacobitical pamphlet".

Another political satire was *A Compleat Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage*, directed against the Licensers for their suppression of a play which was hostile to Sir Robert Walpole.

A more serious undertaking was the catalogue of the Harleian Library. The publisher was Thomas Osborne, who is remembered, if for nothing else, for Johnson's famous onslaught on him when accused of inattention and delay.

There are many variants of the story. "There is nothing to tell, dearest lady," said Johnson to Mrs Thrale, "but that he was insolent and I beat him, and that he was a blockhead and told of it.... I have beat many a fellow but the rest had the wit to hold their tongues."

Shortly after this there appeared the *Life of Savage*, from one point of view, perhaps, the most intimate of Johnson's works in the early Grub Street period; and, later, the first of Johnson's Shakespearean criticisms—the *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth*—and the *Plan* of the Dictionary.

Fundamentally, of course, the motives which led Johnson to undertake the *Dictionary of the English Language* were those of scholarship, research, analysis, classification, exposition—it was ultimately the application of such processes to the English language which made the work seem worth doing, if indeed it could be done. But it was the booksellers, not a committee of learned men, who propounded the scheme to Johnson and finally worried him into the acceptance of the task; and Johnson set himself no higher than a bookseller's hack. He began his work in lexicography "with the pleasing hope that, as it was low, it likewise would be safe"; and when he came to Grub Street in the Dictionary he defined it as "the name of a street in London, much inhabited by writers of small histories, *dictionaries*, and temporary poems".

In the end, of course, it was the *Dictionary* which delivered Johnson from the bondage of literary hack-work. The author of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, of *Rasselas*, of *The Rambler* and *The Idler*, would in any event have secured a measure of literary fame; but His Majesty's pension of £300 per annum was paid to the Great Lexicographer, and it was the pension that rescued Johnson from Grub Street.

A discussion of Johnson's early life in London must sooner or later lead to the question: To what extent of misery was Johnson brought in Grub Street? For many modern readers, especially those of a generation or two back, the answer has been

partially, and of course brilliantly, anticipated by Macaulay, to whom Johnson was "the solitary specimen of a past age, the survivor of the genuine race of Grub Street hacks", those hacks whose lot it was

> to lodge in a garret up four pair of stairs, to dine in a cellar among footmen out of place, to translate ten hours a day for the wages of a ditcher, to be hunted by bailiffs from one haunt of beggary and pestilence to another...to die in an hospital and to be buried in a parish vault....

All this is challenged with a truly Johnsonian common sense by Mr Saintsbury in *The Peace of the Augustans*, and it involves no disloyalty to Johnson to agree with Mr Saintsbury's main contentions, namely, that considering the cost of living in the eighteenth century, Johnson was not badly paid for what he wrote and that his misery during the Grub Street period was not primarily the fault of Grub Street at all.

The first of these points is a statistical one, and although statistics can be made to prove anything, such records as we have of Johnson's earnings tend to show that he was not worse paid than adventurers in literature of other periods. The second point is of the highest importance: it has been noted already that Johnson went into Grub Street with his eyes open. Miserable he was, but his misery sprang not from

> Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail,

but from his own constitution—his ill-health and

is melancholia and the inertia which they produced. He thanked Mrs Thrale for the soothing of a life, not temporarily, but *radically* wretched. In the intimate meditations of his early London days he complains not primarily of poverty or the hardness of his lot but of his bad health, his melancholy and, above all, his idleness. There is no evidence to suggest that, if Johnson had been rather more successful as a teacher and had firmly established an academy for young gentlemen at or near Lichfield, he would have been intrinsically happier than he was in Exeter Street or Gough Square; and it is quite certain that, as Mr Saintsbury suggests, a country parsonage would have added boredom to his other terrors.

Of all the terrors by which Johnson was assailed, oneliness was the greatest. He would never trust himself alone, except when reading or writing; he was grateful to anyone who called upon him; he would beg a friend to go home with him just in order to avoid travelling in the coach alone. What he asked of his friends was not that they should be literary or intellectual or even virtuous, but that they should be clubable. Whether he found this quality in the company which gathered round Edward Cave at St John's Gate is doubtful; he was no doubt happier in the club, of his own foundation, which belongs to the Grub Street period.

This was the Ivy Lane Club founded in the winter of 1749. It met at the King's Head, a famous beefsteak house in Ivy Lane, and consisted

of ten members. It is noteworthy that the members were not, for the most part, literary men. There was Samuel Salter, sometime Archdeacon of Norfolk, not a profound scholar but a man who enlivened conversation by the relation of a variety of curious facts; there was John Ryland, a West India merchant; there was John Payne, a bookseller who subsequently exchanged the uncertainties of publishing for the more stable accountancy of the Bank of England; there was Samuel Dyer, a fine scholar originally destined for Holy Orders, but of whom it was whispered that his religion was "that of Socrates"; there were three physicians: Bathurst, the best beloved of Johnson's friends; Edmund Barker, who was so frequently snubbed by Johnson that he gradually ceased to attend; and William McGhie, a Scotsman and "one of those few of his country whom Johnson could endure"; finally there were two of Johnson's oldest friends, Richard Hawkesworth and Sir John Hawkins.

What drew Johnson to a club like this? Hawkins gives the right answer:

> Thither [he says] he constantly resorted, and, with a disposition to please and be pleased, would pass those hours in a free and unrestrained interchange of sentiments which otherwise had been spent at home in painful reflection.

The picture of Johnson in Grub Street, then, is not one of unmitigated gloom. Johnson, though he never ceased to regard poverty as anything but an evil, would have admitted that he owed much

to Grub Street. It is true that it left a touch of bitterness. It made him coldly critical of men like Gray and Walpole and Lyttelton, men who had enjoyed the continuous comfort of domestic or academic bowers. But it was in Grub Street that he gained his immense knowledge of what ultimately interested him most—all sorts and conditions of men; it was in Grub Street that he learnt to practise his magnificent charity. Broken-down hacks, broken-down doctors, broken-down women —nothing mattered save that they were broken down. It was in Grub Street that Johnson became the great apostle of the undeserving poor.

And if Johnson owed something to Grub Street, we surely owe a great deal more. For if Johnson had been left a comfortable income by his father, who can dare to say that he would ever have completed any literary work at all? Suppose he had been a fellow of Pembroke, we might have had an edition, say of Lactantius; but more likely a sheaf of abortive "Proposals". Suppose he had been a country clergyman, should we have had anything more than a volume of sermons, posthumously collected and published—by subscription? Suppose he had been a member of Parliament, should we have had more than a few fugitive political tracts?

Fortunately, these are vain speculations. But the fact remains that in his early days Johnson wrote only when a creditor, or a printer's devil, was knocking at the door.

JOHNSON'S BOOKS

On Tuesday, April 18, 1775, Johnson, Boswell, and Sir Joshua Reynolds dined with Mr Cambridge at the "beautiful villa" of the last-named gentleman near Twickenham:

> No sooner had we made our bow to Mr Cambridge, in his library, than Johnson ran eagerly to one side of the room, intent on poring over the backs of the books. Sir Joshua observed, (aside,) "He runs to the books, as I do to the pictures: but I have the advantage. I can see much more of the pictures than he can of the books". Mr Cambridge, upon this, politely said, "Dr Johnson, I am going with your pardon to accuse myself, for I have the same custom which I perceive you have. But it seems odd that one should have such a desire to look at the backs of books". Johnson, ever ready for contest, instantly started from his reverie, wheeled about and answered, "Sir, the reason is very plain. Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it. When we enquire into any subject, the first thing we have to do is to know what books have treated of it. This leads us to look at catalogues, and the backs of books in libraries".

Two months after Johnson's death there was issued *A Catalogue of the valuable Library of Books of the late learned Samuel Johnson, Esq., LL.D.* This library, consisting of 662 lots, was sold by auction by Mr Christie, "at his Great Room in Pall Mall", on Wednesday, February 16, 1785, and the three following days. On the preceding Monday

and Tuesday the public had the opportunity of seeing at least the backs of Johnson's books.

In 1925 a uniquely interesting copy of this catalogue was made public, in the form of a facsimile of the copy in the possession of Colonel Ralph Isham, an introductory essay being contributed by that gayest of Johnsonians, Mr Edward Newton. In this copy there is not only a record of the prices fetched but also a note, in a very neat hand, of the purchaser of each lot. Thus one may contemplate the fate, as well as the nature and extent, of Johnson's library.

It is significant that Mr Christie described the books as belonging to "the late *learned* Samuel Johnson", and a cursory glance at, say, the folios sold on the first day, or indeed at any section of the catalogue, will give a hint of its general character:

87. Bibliotheca veterum patrum, 1624
88. Pole's synopsis criticorum, 1669
89. Linguarum veterum Thesauri, a G. Hickerio,[1] 1703
90. Flavii Josephi opera, a J. Hudsono, 1720

"Not voyages and travels, but all literature, Sir, all ancient writers, all manly."

A partial classification of the literary items has been made by Professor Houston in his study of Johnson as a humanist,[2] but here it may be suffi-

[1] *Sic.* The editor was Hickes. The catalogue is full of misprints.

[2] *Doctor Johnson, A Study in Eighteenth Century Humanism*, 1923.

cient to note that of the 650 lots (representing at least 3000, perhaps even 5000, volumes) which are recorded in the sale-catalogue, more than 200 relate to the classical writers of antiquity, about 130 to theology and philosophy, 80 to history and law, nearly 40 to mathematics and science, and more than 20 to medicine.

The predominance of classical literature is not unexpected and the names of the great Renaissance scholars (Casaubon, Erasmus, Scaliger, Stephanus, Vossius, and others) are prominent. Several early editions are noteworthy, such as an Aldine Hesychius *Dictionarium* (1514) and an Aldine *Orationes Rhetoricae Graecae* (1513). Both of these were *editiones principes* and fetched 7*s.* and 2*s.* respectively. Other Aldine editions are Horace (ed. Muretus, 1555), Apollonius Rhodius (1521), Quintilian (1512) and the Greek Grammar of Lascaris. There is a Basel Virgil of 1534 and a Plantin Virgil of 1575; a Plutarch *Moralia Opuscula* of 1542 and a Lucian of 1563, both printed at Basel. The Oxford Press is represented in this section of the catalogue by a Quintilian of 1693, two editions of Josephus (1687 and 1720), Hutchinson's Xenophon (1727) and Shaw's Apollonius Rhodius (1779); the Cambridge Press by Homer (1689), Catullus (1703), Sallust (1710), together with Kuster's edition of Suidas' Lexicon (1705) in three volumes.

Only one fifteenth-century book appears in the catalogue, Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*

(1491). This volume, in company with an early edition of Plato's *Meno*, was sold for 3*s*. 6*d*.

In the theological section there appear many Greek Testaments (including Erasmus' edition of 1527), various bibles (including the Icelandic version of 1644), the Gothic version of the Gospels published at Oxford in 1750, much patristic literature (Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, Justin Martyr, Augustine, Chrysostom), a Roman missal, various editions of the Septuagint, the works of such English divines as Andrewes, Chillingworth, Latimer, Butler, Clarke, Blair, Waterland, Wesley, Baxter, Lowth and, finally, Bampton's Lecture Sermons preached at Oxford in 1784. Of Baxter's works it may be remembered that Johnson spoke in terms of unusually sweeping praise. "Read any of them," he told Boswell, "they are all good."

The chronological range of Johnson's medical books is almost equally wide.

Beginning with the 1538 and 1542 editions of Galen and the *editio princeps* of Aretaeus *De Causis Morborum* (1554), we pass to the works of Vesalius (probably Boerhaave's edition) and the *Graecorum chirurgici libri* of Soranus (1754). Later we come to Salmon's *Practice of Curing* (1684), Hill's *Materia Medica*, Astruc's *De Morbis Venereis*, the Chirurgical Works of Mr Pott (one of the doctors who attended Johnson), Cheselden's *Anatomy*, and Cheyne's *English Malady*.

This last book Johnson more than once re-

commended Boswell to read. First published in 1733, it dealt with the nature, causes, and cure of nervous distempers, and the author's own case is described at length. He had suffered from many disorders and at one time was so wasted by a fever that

> Upon my total Recovery, my Appetite being unsatiable, I suck'd up and retained the Juices...of my food like a sponge, and thereby suddenly grew plump, fat, and hale to a Wonder; but indeed too fast: However for near twenty years I continued sober moderate and plain in my Diet and in my greatest Health drank not above a Quart or three Pints at most of Wine any day...never tasting any Supper and at Breakfast nothing but Green Tea, without any Eatable; but by these means every Dinner necessarily became a Surfeit and a Debauch, and in ten or twelve years I swelled to such an enormous size, that upon my last weighing I exceeded 32 stone.

Finally, after sufferings on which he could scarcely reflect without horror, Cheyne was driven to a diet of milk, seed, and vegetables. Johnson, for all his praise of the book, never seems to have got so far. Temperance, as Cheyne said, is a relative thing.

Other names in the catalogue, familiar even to laymen, are those of Mudge, Mead and James. John Mudge, of Plymouth, was a man whose technical skill Johnson valued as highly as he did his friendship, and is represented in his library by a work *On a catarrhous cough*. Near it on the shelf, no doubt, was the *Praecepta Medica* of Dr Mead, of whom Johnson said, perhaps rather wistfully, that he lived more in the broad sunshine of life than almost any man. Dr James was the inventor

of the famous powders which are alleged to have hastened Goldsmith's death, and author of the three-volume medicinal dictionary, for which Johnson himself wrote the Dedication to Dr Mead, and possibly some articles as well. Johnson's copy of this *Dictionary* fetched £3. 19*s*., a very high price as prices ruled at the sale.

In the category of general literature it is interesting to note Johnson's comparatively slender equipment in regard to English literature. Of Shakespeareana he had the second issue of the third folio (1664), Warburton's edition of 1747[1], Grey's Notes (1754), and Remarks (1755), and Steevens' reprint of 1766, together with one or two less important editions and, finally, a volume which is catalogued as a first folio.

Amongst other English poets and dramatists we find Chaucer, Gower, Drayton, Barclay, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Spenser, Marvell, Samuel Butler, Dryden and Pope.

The antiquarian prose of the seventeenth century is represented by Camden and Fuller, Burton, and Sir Thomas Browne. The last two, of course, were among Johnson's favourite authors, but their names appear only once each.

Lastly, there is a moderate collection of the work of writers contemporary with Johnson him-

[1] Used by Johnson both for the *Dictionary* and his *Shakespeare*. For the subsequent history of the set, see Miss A. Cuming's article in *The Review of English Studies* (April, 1927), pp. 208–212.

self, including Reynolds's *Discourses*, Hoole's Tasso and Ariosto, Goldsmith's *Citizen* and *Roman History*, Robertson's *Histories*, Boswell's *Corsica*, Warton's *Life of Pope*, Hugh Kelly's *Works*, *Clarissa* (in English and Dutch), Baretti's *Dictionary*, Burney's *History of Music*, one copy of Johnson's *Journey* printed at Leipzig, a copy of *The Lives of the Poets* and nineteen copies of the *Dictionary*, some with MS. notes.

Even a brief and partial summary such as this is sufficient to show that the more important part of Johnson's library could be properly appraised only by a classical scholar of the old school who was also a bibliographer. The ordinary Johnsonian may be forgiven for turning with greater avidity to the list of purchasers. "Sir," he may say in excuse, "the biographical part of libraries is what I love most."

First, certain clauses in Johnson's will must be borne in mind:

> Also, I give and bequeath to Sir John Hawkins, one of my Executors, the Annales Ecclesiastici of Baronius, and Holinshed's and Stowe's Chronicles, and also an octavo Common Prayer-Book. To Bennet Langton, Esq., I give and bequeath my Polyglot Bible. To Sir Joshua Reynolds, my great French Dictionary, by Martiniere, and my own copy of my folio English Dictionary of the last revision....

There were similar legacies to Dr William Scott, Mr Windham, Mr Strahan; and to Dr Heberden, Dr Brocklesby, Dr Butter, Mr Cruikshank, Mr Holder, Gerard Hamilton, Mrs Gardiner, Frances

Reynolds, Mr Hoole and his son, Johnson bequeathed "each a book at their election, to keep as a token of remembrance".

Furthermore, as both Birkbeck Hill and Austin Dobson have surmised, Johnson no doubt made several verbal bequests to those who came to see him in his last days. Consequently, many books, and especially, one may conjecture, those with personal associations, were disposed of before the library as a whole came under the hammer of Mr Christie.

Still, a number of Johnson's friends came to bid at the sale. Dr Burney, for instance, whose library Johnson had praised as a "great accumulation of knowledge", bought Grainger's Tibullus, the *Works* of Salmasius, a lot of seven volumes described as "Juvenalis opera, etc.", and eight portraits, framed and glazed. Of Grainger's translation of Tibullus it may be recalled that Johnson had given his approval of the work. It was better, he thought, than the same writer's poem, *The Sugar-Cane*:

> What could he make of a sugar-cane? One might as well write "The Parsley-bed, a Poem"; or "The Cabbage-garden, a Poem".

Bennet Langton's purchases have little personal interest, though they accord well enough with his scholarly piety: a lot of twelve volumes containing *Senecae opera*, etc., and another including *Historia Nicephori* and *Limborch de Veritate religionis Christianae*.

A parcel of three volumes bought by Mr Seward has more allurement for the modern collector. Two titles only are specified in the catalogue—Beattie's *Essay on Truth*[1] of which Johnson wrote that the more he looked upon it, the more he liked it; and Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to Corsica*. On the whole, Mr Seward may be reckoned to have got good value for his expenditure of sixteen shillings.

This copy of Boswell's *Corsica* bought by Seward is one of several works by Johnson's friends which appear in the catalogue. Another is Goldsmith's *Roman History*, which was sold in company with Robertson's *History of Scotland* for twelve shillings. Burney's *History of Music* fetched a higher price (one pound nineteen shillings), and was secured by Edmond Malone. Probably Johnson had read but little of it, though he had been diligent in helping Burney in its preparation by means of introductions to Oxford scholars. It was *à propos* of this book, too, that Johnson pronounced a shrewd judgment upon the science of advertising. Talking to him one night at Montrose, Boswell observed that Hawkins's and Burney's books on the history of music were announced about the same time. Was this not unlucky? Would they not hurt one another? "No, sir," replied Johnson, "they will do good to one another. Some will buy the one, some the other, and compare them; and so a talk is made about a thing, and the books are sold."

[1] A presentation copy, now in the British Museum. Seward bought it for Queenie Thrale.

Horace Walpole, as one would expect, did not figure prominently amongst the buyers at the sale. The one lot which attracted him was that containing Mason's *Caractacus*, the poem which Johnson used to turn into ridicule for the diversion of himself and chance-comers to a coffee-house. "I always thought very well of Mason," said Johnson, "for a Cambridge man; he is, I believe, a mighty blameless character." Horace Walpole was not the only collector who attended the sale. Isaac Gossett, the Lepidus of Dibdin's *Bibliomania*, bought nearly a dozen lots, including Vossius' *Dissertationes de LXX interpretibus* and many classical works, such as the Catullus printed at Cambridge for Tonson in 1703, Bentley's *Manilius*, a French bible printed at Amsterdam in 1678, and Walpole's *Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors* (1759). But the most interesting item bought by Gossett is perhaps No. 495, a lot of five volumes which contained Hutton's *History of Birmingham* —a book immortalised in Malone's anecdote of March, 1783:

> When I called about two months ago, I found him in his arm-chair by the fireside, before which a few apples were laid. He was reading. I asked him what book he had got. He said the *History of Birmingham*. Local histories, I observed, were generally dull. "It is true, sir; but this has a peculiar merit with me; for I passed some of my early years and married my wife there." I supposed the apples were preparing as medicine. "Why no, sir; I believe they are only there because I want something to do. These are some of the solitary expedients to which we are driven by sickness. I have

been confined this week past, and here you find me roasting apples, and reading the *History of Birmingham*."

One of the most intimate friends of Johnson in his later years was Dr Brocklesby. A member of the Essex Head Club, he attended Johnson in his last illness, and on one occasion referred to his generosity with a tear of gratitude in his eye. Shortly before his death Johnson took special pains to confirm his physician in the truths of Christianity.

At the sale Dr Brocklesby bought two Foulis editions of Xenophon, a Lucian of 1728, Van Swieten's commentary on Boerhaave (1742) and Casaubon's Juvenal and Persius (1695).

Sentiment, no doubt, prompted the choice of the last item, for doctor and patient enjoyed quoting Juvenal to each other. On June 20, 1783, a few days after he had suffered a paralytic stroke Johnson wrote to Mrs Thrale:

> I was this day directed to eat flesh, and I dined very copiously upon roasted lamb and boiled pease: I then went to sleep in a chair, and when I waked, I found Dr Brocklesby sitting by me, and fell to talking with him in such a manner as made me glad, and, I hope made me thankful. The Doctor fell to repeating Juvenal's ninth satire; but I let him see that the province was mine.

Again, about a week before Johnson's death Dr Brocklesby quoted to him the lines from the tenth satire, beginning

> Orandum est, ut sit mens sana in corpore sano.

In one line, however,

> Qui spatium vitae extremum inter munera ponat

he misquoted *supremum* for *extremum*. Johnson, though dying, was still on the alert.

> His critical ear [says Boswell] "instantly took offence, and discoursing vehemently on the unmetrical effect of such a lapse, he showed himself as full as ever of the spirit of the grammarian".

It is small wonder that Dr Brocklesby was willing to pay 34*s*. (a high price as prices went then) for that copy of Juvenal.

As has been noted already, Johnson was concerned with the spiritual, as well as the scholastic, salvation of Dr Brocklesby. In particular he pressed upon him the study of Dr Samuel Clarke, as being "fullest on the propitiatory sacrifice". Originally, Johnson had spurned Clarke. He was an Arian, "a condemned heretic upon the doctrine of the Trinity", and his name was rightly excluded from the *Dictionary*. But in his later years Clarke's Sermons were constantly in Johnson's hands, as the *Prayers and Meditations* show. Two copies of these Sermons appear in the catalogue and one was bought by John Hoole, the translator of Tasso and Ariosto. No one was more faithful than Hoole in his attendance upon the dying lexicographer. It was he who kept a diary of his visits to Johnson in the last three weeks of his life. Boswell was allowed to use extracts from this diary and the full narrative was published in the *European Magazine*

for September, 1799. Hoole's other purchases included a copy of Baretti's *Italian Dictionary* (a natural choice), early editions of Statius and Ovid, and an undescribed Aristotle.

The purchases of "Des Moulins" (no doubt John Desmoulins, son of Mrs Desmoulins and grandson of Dr Swinfen, Johnson's godfather) are such as to make the modern collector ache with envy:

A large bundle of curious pamphlets in quarto (£1. 12*s.* 0*d.*).
A ditto in octavo (£1. 7*s.* 0*d.*).

What did these delectable bundles contain? Were they political tracts? Were some of them by Johnson himself? Were they poetry or prose? "I happened," says Boswell, "I know not how, to say that a pamphlet meant a prose piece." Johnson: "No, sir. A few sheets of poetry unbound are a pamphlet, as much as a few sheets of prose."

Edmond Malone bought, besides Burney's *History of Music*, the *Bibliotheca Graeca* of Fabricius in eight volumes and a copy of the so-called Rowley poems by Thomas Chatterton. Malone had previously interested himself in these poems and had published a pamphlet entitled "Cursory Observations on the Poems attributed to Thomas Rowley"; Johnson himself had not been able wholly to withhold his admiration of Chatterton. "It is wonderful," he said, "how the whelp has written such things."

The presence of General Oglethorpe at the Johnson sale has long been made famous by the sketch of the old gentleman seated, complete with sword, on the edge of a table with a catalogue in his hand.[1]

Besides some early editions of the classics General Oglethorpe bought *The Acts and Deeds of Sir William Wallace* (1758), the learned Mrs Carter's Epictetus and three portraits, one of them of Mrs Montague.

Item No. 284 (Twiss's *Travels in Spain*) has an interest for readers of Boswell.

> I have not indeed [said Johnson] cut the leaves yet; but I have read in them where the pages are open, and I do not suppose that what is in the pages which are closed is worse than what is in the open pages.

Only on one book did Mr Christie make a comment as to rarity: The Earl of Northumberland's *Household Book*, which he described as "very scarce". This book was, as Nichols said, "conducted through the press" by Dr Percy in 1770 while he was living with the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland as domestic chaplain. Johnson's copy was bought by Thornton, the bookseller, for £3. 15*s*.

What appears to be a rarity indeed is Lot No. 467—*Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*, 1623. The date, however, as Austin Dobson pointed out, is a misprint for 1632. This copy of the second folio had a history of some interest. It had

[1] The General's copy of the Catalogue is now in the possession of Mr Edward Newton.

belonged to Theobald, the editor of Shakespeare. At his death in 1744 it came into the possession of Osborne the bookseller. Osborne presented it to Johnson, and at the sale of Johnson's library it was bought by Samuel Ireland (father of W. H. Ireland, the Shakespearean forger). Many years later the late Sir Henry Irving paid £100 for it. Inside it he found notes made by Ireland on the history of the book[1] and a newspaper cutting stating that

> in the late sale of Dr Johnson's books there were several articles which sold wonderfully cheap, particularly the following—a folio edition of Shakespeare, the second, with a large number of notes, MS. in the margin, Johnson's own handwriting.

For this treasure Samuel Ireland paid 22*s*.

Dr Horsley, whose name, curiously enough, is the only one which receives an explanatory footnote in the catalogue, bought two lots, including a *Thesaurus Ecclesiasticus*, Ephraim Syrus in Greek and the works of Irenaeus. Horsley, successively Bishop of St David's, Rochester, and St Asaph, was a member of the Essex Head Club and a Tory controversialist of the old school: he did not know, he said once in the House of Lords, what the mass of the people in any country had to do with the laws but to obey them. Lot 431 is described as "Derby's Commentary on the evangelists, 2 v. 1777, Smart's poems, 1752". The first of these items should have been described as *A Com-*

[1] See Birkbeck Hill, *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, I, 304. The initials at the foot of the notes should evidently be *S. I.* not *S. J.*

mentary, with Notes, on the four Evangelists and the Acts of the Apostles, by Dr Zachary Pearce, Bishop of Rochester. It was posthumously published under the editorship of the Reverend Mr Derby in 1777. Zachary Pearce was the only person who had given Johnson any assistance in the compilation of the *Dictionary*, and Johnson in his turn contributed the finest of his dedications to Pearce's volume:

TO THE KING

Sir,

I presume to lay before your Majesty the last labours of a learned Bishop, who died in the toils and duties of his calling. He is now beyond the reach of all earthly honours and rewards; and only the hope of inciting others to imitate him makes it now fit to be remembered, that he enjoyed in his life the favour of your Majesty.

The tumultuary life of Princes seldom permits them to survey the wide extent of national interest, without losing sight of private merit; to exhibit qualities which may be imitated by the highest and the humblest of mankind; and to be at once amiable and great.

Such characters, if now and then they appear in history, are contemplated with admiration. May it be the ambition of all your subjects to make haste with their tribute of reverence: and as posterity may learn from your Majesty how Kings should live, may they learn, likewise, from your people, how they should be honoured.

It was an odd chance that tied the learned prelate's theological commentaries in the same bundle as the poems of poor Kit Smart—and yet not so odd, perhaps; for Kit Smart won the Seatonian

Prize Poem in the University of Cambridge for five years out of six and the regulations for the Seatonian Prize are instinct with eighteenth-century piety. The terms of Mr Seaton's Will placed it in the disposal of the Vice-Chancellor, the Master of Clare Hall, and the Greek Professor:

> Which three persons aforesaid shall give out a subject, which subject shall for the first year be one or other of the Perfections or Attributes of the Supreme Being, and so the succeeding years till that subject is exhausted; and afterwards the subject shall be either Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell, Purity of Heart, etc., or whatsoever else may be judged by the Vice-Chancellor, Master of Clare Hall, and Greek Professor, to be most conducive to the honour of the Supreme Being and recommendation of virtue.

With which sentiments Johnson would no doubt have been as completely in sympathy as he was with the laxity of Kit Smart's laundry.

A buyer described as "Fergusson" (possibly Sir Adam Fergusson, the "vile Whig", with whom Johnson argued about luxury) secured the lot for 19*s*.

Lots 136 and 158 are described as being bought by "Sir John Henderson". This may perhaps have been the eccentric John Henderson of Johnson's own college "celebrated for his wonderful acquirements in Alchymy, Judicial Astrology, and other abstruse and curious learning", who rejoiced to make one of the party when Johnson showed Hannah More round Pembroke. Certainly the books selected (a Paris Cicero of 1543 and a Lucian

in five volumes) accord well enough with the tastes and career of one who taught Latin and Greek on the continent at the age of twelve.

Dr Edward Harwood, precursor of Moulton, Moffat and many others in his *Liberal Translation of the New Testament*, bought Johnson's copy of Suidas (1630) as well as Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, Styan Thirlby's edition of Justin Martyr, and a 1625 edition of Athanasius.

It was at the house of Mr Wickins, a draper in Lichfield, that Dr Johnson once picked up the *Liberal Translation of the New Testament.*

> The passage which first caught his eye was from that sublime apostrophe in St John upon the raising of Lazarus, "Jesus wept"; which Harwood had conceitedly rendered "and Jesus, the Saviour of the world, burst into a flood of tears". He contemptuously threw the book aside exclaiming "Puppy".

Such are a few of the digressions into which one is led by the contemplation of some of the purchasers of Johnson's books. But it should be noted that in 1785, as now, the greater part of such a collection went into the hands of the booksellers; and the names of Chapman, Collins, Cuthell, Faulder, Hayes, Hodgson, Johnson, King, Lea, Lowndes, Manson, Marsh, Miles, Nourse, Ogilvie, Thornton and White are easily recognisable. The largest purchaser of all was "Money", who took more than 120 lots—a fifth of the whole library. As there appears to have been no prominent bookseller or wealthy collector of this name, one is driven to the

conclusion that the word must stand for that personage who in certain spheres of accountancy is known as "Mr Cash".

A word may be said in conclusion of Johnson himself in relation to his books.

Of his physical treatment of them it is hard, as Matthew Arnold said of Macaulay's *Horatius*, to read without a cry of pain. "Slovenly" and "careless" are the epithets applied by Boswell, who found him more than once wearing hedgers' gloves and buffeting his books in a cloud of dust; whilst the story of the sudden pouncing of poor Garrick's Petrarch over Johnson's head on the floor is well known.

Johnson, indeed, had probably little of the collector's feeling towards his library. He valued his early editions no doubt, but he valued them as the work of great masters and as the storehouses of editorial learning—not as very scarce in this or that state.

He had begun his reading in his father's bookshop and, though he learned how to bind a book, he made but a poor show as a bookseller. As an undergraduate, however, he had a remarkable collection of books of which a list has fortunately been preserved[1]. In the list, editions of classical authors are frequent, but do not predominate. Latin, as would be expected, is much more strongly represented than Greek; among the works

[1] See Reade, *Johnsonian Gleanings*, v. pp. 27–30, 213–229.

by English authors, are More's *Utopia*, Milton's *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*, Eachard's *Gazetteer*, Locke's *On Education*, Addison's *Miscellaneous Works*, Barclay's *Argenis* and *Satyricon*; among the English poets are Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Waller, Butler, Prior, Pope, Ambrose Philips, Edward Young, Edmund Smith, Blackmore, Rowe, and Garth. There are notable omissions—Euripides, Shakespeare, Sir Thomas Browne, for example; and not many titles can be identified with those recorded in the sale catalogue. But in fifty years a scholar's library suffers many changes.

Of Johnson as a bookbuyer we read little; though Boswell quotes a letter of January 6, 1784, to Mr Dilly in which Johnson orders a set of "Burton's Books", a series which he remembered having seen sold in earlier days by the booksellers on London Bridge. In later years, no doubt, the greater part of Johnson's books came to him as presents from booksellers and authors. On the proper use of books Johnson spoke and wrote with a mind cleared of cant. He did not pretend that he read everything from cover to cover ("Sir, do *you* read books *through*?"); he did not pretend that men in general were prompted to the reading of books by lofty motives:

> The most general and prevalent reason for study is the impossibility of finding another amusement equally cheap or constant, equally independent of the hour or the weather.

He did not pretend that books furnished the best material for talk. He liked a man, he said, whose knowledge was fresh from life, not strained through books.

At the same time Johnson, the scholar, knew the essential value of solid reading as the foundation of sound learning and research: "The mental disease of the present generation", he wrote in the very words almost of the moralists of to-day, "is impatience of study, contempt of the great masters of ancient wisdom, and a disposition to rely wholly upon unassisted genius and natural sagacity". Further, Johnson, the man, felt and endeavoured to communicate the indefinable companionship of books. "Have as many books about you as you can," he told Boswell; "let a boy at first read *any* English book which happens to engage his attention." "You have done a great deal when you have brought him to have entertainment from a book."

It may be not without gratification to the Lexicographer's shade rolling majestically along some Elysian avenue lined with unearthly folios that men should still seek instruction and entertainment from the contemplation of Johnson's books.

THE FOCUS OF THE LICHFIELD LAMPS

"EVERY MAN", said Johnson with characteristic candour, "has a lurking wish to appear considerable in his native place", and the record of Johnson's association with Lichfield men and things is not the least interesting feature in the career of one who is commonly hailed as one of the great Londoners of history. Macaulay's rhetorical circumscription of Johnson's interests might lead, and no doubt did lead, many of his readers to suppose that Johnson never ventured, either in person or in thought, beyond a mile radius from the full tide of human existence at Charing Cross:

> Johnson was no master of the great science of human nature. He had studied, not the genus man, but the species Londoner. Nobody was ever so thoroughly conversant with all the forms of life and all the shades of moral and intellectual character which were to be seen from Islington to the Thames and from Hyde Park Corner to Mile-End Green. But his philosophy stopped at the first turnpike-gate. Of the rural life of England he knew nothing, and he took it for granted that everybody who lived in the country was either stupid or miserable.

The falsity of this generalisation has been exposed with exhaustive illustration by Birkbeck Hill, and even the casual reader of Boswell would not be slow to challenge the injustice done by Macaulay to Johnson's enlarged and lively mind

and to his abiding interest in the variety, as well as in the vanity, of human wishes.

Yet in Macaulay's hyperbole there lies a suggestion of the truth. Johnson did not of course take it for granted that dwellers in the country were stupid or miserable; it was seldom, indeed, that he took anything for granted. But when he stayed in the country, or in a provincial town, he was essentially a visitor from London; he was not a home-coming countryman thankful to escape from the noise and bustle of Fleet Street. His standards of social life and conversation were the standards of a Londoner. In consequence, provincial life often seemed to him dull and trivial; boredom descended upon him and he would tend, with a certain morbidity, to dwell upon the deaths of his friends or the manifestations of his own disease. In one sense, it is true to say that circumstances, rather than temperament, determined that Johnson should be a Londoner. As he grew up in Lichfield it is unlikely that he was fired with any ambition to make the conquest of literary London. Had his father lived longer or had he left his business in a more flourishing state, it is conceivable that Samuel Johnson might have lived and died a Lichfield bookseller—a learned one, no doubt, and probably the first authority in the city upon matters of local history and antiquarian interest. Had his interests thus been drawn inwards to his native city, we cannot doubt that in maturity, as in boyhood, he would have been ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν, a king

of men and mayor of Lichfield. Had he been able to proceed to his Oxford degree, he might well have taken orders and spent at least a part of his life in the Augustan calm of a deanery; had more young gentlemen flocked to the academy at Edial, Johnson might well have become absorbed for many years in the relatively obscure work of a country pedagogue.

But it is time to turn from conjecture to fact. The first twenty-six years of Johnson's life were spent in or near Lichfield. In Lichfield the foundations of his education were laid by Dame Oliver, who first taught him to read and declared that he was the best scholar she ever had; by the mysterious Tom Browne, the shoemaker of Dam Street, who published a spelling book and dedicated it to the UNIVERSE; by Mr Hawkins and Mr Hunter of Lichfield Grammar School. Mr Hunter was not of those who spare the rod; indeed, he regarded the rod as a means of saving his pupils from the gallows and it was to the strictness of this early discipline that Johnson attributed the fundamental soundness of his Latin scholarship. According to the recollections of his contemporary, Edmund Hector, the correction administered to Johnson was not for syntactical errors but for "talking and diverting other boys from their business".

At the age of fifteen Johnson had a little more than a year's schooling at Stourbridge, after which he returned to Lichfield. There for the next two years he remained and in somewhat desultory

fashion was engaged in learning his father's trade. In later years he claimed with a certain pride that he had been "bred a bookseller", but it was the bookman that predominated—"to supersede the pleasures of reading by the attentions of traffic was a task he never could master". He did, however, learn how to bind a book and many years later he practised this craft in Mrs Thrale's summer-house at Streatham. It is to these two years in Lichfield that certain well-known incidents belong: Johnson's refusal, for instance, to take his place at the bookstall in Uttoxeter market and the search for apples on an upper shelf in his father's shop which led to Johnson's absorption in a folio volume of Petrarch. It is unlikely that the son did much to promote the father's business. Samuel indeed used the bookshop not as a shop but as a library. His great period of study, as he told Bennet Langton in later years, was between the ages of twelve and eighteen, and the two years in his father's shop gave him the most valuable of all privileges for a bookman—a free range over books outside the normal curriculum. What he read was "not voyages and travels, but all literature, Sir, all ancient writers, all manly.... I had looked into a great many books, which were not commonly known at the Universities, where they seldom read any books but what are put into their hands by their tutors". It would indeed be difficult to exaggerate the benefit which Johnson received from this period of what Boswell calls "roaming at large in the fields of literature".

Johnson entered Pembroke College, Oxford, in October 1728 and it has now been established beyond doubt that he was in residence only until December 1729. At Lichfield the family business was declining, and when Michael Johnson died in 1731 his son received but twenty pounds from the estate. He himself was unemployed; he tried, without success, to obtain employment at the Grammar School at Stourbridge, and when he secured a similar post at Market Bosworth he found the work extremely irksome: "He did not know whether it was more disagreeable for him to teach, or the boys to learn, the grammar rules". After a few months he was again unemployed and at the invitation of his school-fellow, Edmund Hector, went to stay at Birmingham for six months, in the house of Thomas Warren, with whom Hector lodged. Warren was one of the "three eminent booksellers" of Birmingham, and Johnson was able to lend him a hand in his trade and also contributed some essays to Warren's paper, *The Birmingham Journal.* It was for Warren, too, that Johnson's first substantial literary work was undertaken. This was the translation from the French of Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia.* Johnson's constitutional indolence led to a delay in the supply of copy; Hector pressed him on the printer's behalf, so Johnson "lay in bed with the book, which was a quarto, before him, and dictated while Hector wrote". The translator's fee amounted to five guineas. In 1734 Johnson spent a short time in Lichfield, during which he issued proposals for an

edition of the Latin poems of Politian. Subscriptions were invited to be sent either to the editor or to his brother Nathaniel, who, with his mother, now carried on the bookselling business. But subscribers were lacking, and before the end of the year Johnson was back in Birmingham, offering to Edward Cave, editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, to fill a column in his journal with "short literary dissertations in Latin or English, critical remarks on authors ancient or modern, forgotten poems that deserve revival, or loose pieces... worth preserving". It was in Birmingham, too, at this time, that Johnson's strange marriage was accomplished. According to Boswell the union was one based on intellectual attraction on both sides. Mrs Porter, who was twenty years older than her lover, must, says Boswell, "have had a superiority of understanding and talents, as she certainly inspired him with a more than ordinary passion"; Johnson, on his side, appealed to Mrs Porter as "the most sensible man she had ever seen in her life". Johnson went to Lichfield to ask his mother's consent. Wisely, Boswell does not place any reliance upon the story of this visit as recorded by Miss Anna Seward, grand-daughter of John Hunter, who had taught Johnson his Latin at the Grammar School; but it may be of interest to quote one or two phrases from her account.

> Johnson's wife... had a very red face and very indifferent features; and her manners in advanced life... had an unbecoming excess of girlish levity, and dis-

gusting affectation....Business taking Johnson to Birmingham...he passed all his leisure hours at Mr Porter's, attending his sick-bed, and, in a few months after his death, asked Mrs Johnson's consent to marry the old widow. After expressing surprise at a request so extraordinary—"No, Sam, my willing consent you will never have to so preposterous a match. You are not twenty-five and she is turned of fifty. Where are your means of subsistence? Porter has died poor, in consequence of his wife's expensive habits. You have great talents, but, as yet, have turned them into no profitable channel".

Actually Mrs Porter was forty-six and she brought her bridegroom enough money—about £800—to enable him to establish the private academy at Edial where young gentlemen were boarded and taught the Latin and Greek languages. But only a few young gentlemen took advantage of Johnson's instruction and of these few only one —David Garrick—is commonly remembered. It was after the failure of this enterprise that Johnson, in 1737, determined with 2½*d.* and a half-written tragedy in his pocket to try his fortune in London.

It has seemed worth while to review, thus briefly, the early part of Johnson's career in order to emphasise the fact that by birth and training and early environment Johnson was thoroughly provincial. His only visit to London had been that on which he had been touched by Queen Anne for the King's Evil and throughout his life he preserved a Midland accent in his speech. He never, says Boswell, got entirely free from pronouncing *there* to rhyme with *fear* or from saying *woonse*

instead of *wunse*. Garrick would imitate him over the punch-bowl, calling out "Who's for *poonsh*?". Johnson, of course, like all good patriots, claimed that the people of Lichfield spoke the purest English; but, when he had long been settled in London, he admitted that he consciously guarded himself against provincialisms: "Sir, when people watch me narrowly, and I do not watch myself, they will find me out to be of a particular county. In the same manner, Dunning may be found out to be a Devonshire man. So most Scotchmen may be found out. But, Sir, little aberrations are of no disadvantage". Vivid and splendid as are Boswell's records of conversation at the Club and elsewhere, how much more vivid would they be, were it possible to preserve the little aberrations—Boswell's Scotticisms, Johnson's broad U's, Goldsmith's brogue and perhaps a slight burr in Sir Joshua's Devonian tongue. *Verba volant, scripta manent.*

Further, Johnson, on his arrival in London, was almost without a friend. He brought with him one letter of introduction in which Gilbert Walmsley recommended him as a promising writer of tragedy, but beyond this and his friendship with Henry Harvey, whose regiment had been stationed at Lichfield, he had no social connections. For Johnson London was virtually "a new world" which it was "almost madness to invade", and having once invaded it he was cut off by poverty from the possibility of frequent retreats to his pro-

vincial home. A few months after his first arrival in London he came back to Lichfield to fetch his wife. He stayed for three months, but we have no record of how he spent his time. According to Boswell, he had as yet little to tell his townsmen of the wonders of the Metropolis. In the autumn of 1737 he left for London with Mrs Johnson, and it was twenty-four years before he once more came within the focus of the Lichfield lamps. In the course of that twenty-four years Johnson was to rise from the position of a bookseller's hack to that of the Dictator of literary London; in Lichfield, 116 miles away, the changes during that same period, if less meteoric, were nevertheless considerable. It is this break, during which Johnson became an incorrigible Londoner, that explains the half-humorous petulance which characterises many of his later comments on men and manners in his native city. It was not that he forgot his old friends. To one of them, Gilbert Walmsley, who died in 1751, Johnson was afterwards to pay a tribute that has become classical:

> I knew him very early; he was one of the first friends that literature procured me, and I hope that, at least, my gratitude made me worthy of his notice. He was of an advanced age, and I was only a boy, yet he never received my notions with contempt. He was a Whig, with all the virulence and malevolence of his party; yet difference of opinion did not keep us apart. I honoured him and he endured me.... His studies had been so various, that I am not able to name a man of equal knowledge. His acquaintance with books was

great and what he did not immediately know, he could, at least, tell where to find. Such was his amplitude of learning, and such his copiousness of communication, that it may be doubted whether a day now passes in which I have not some advantage from his friendship.

Amongst the letters of this period which have been preserved, a considerable number are addressed to his step-daughter Lucy Porter. Lucy lived with Johnson's mother and, according to Miss Seward,

kept the best company in our little city, but would make no engagement on market-days, lest Granny, as she called Mrs Johnson, should catch cold by serving in the shop. There Lucy Porter took her place, standing behind the counter, nor thought it a disgrace to thank a poor person who purchased from her a penny battledore.

There are other letters to Edmund Hector and John Taylor. To Hector he wrote on April 15, 1755:

As Nature, I suppose, operates very uniformly, I believe you as well as I are come now to that part in which the gratifications and friendships of younger years operate very powerfully on the mind;

and in the following year:

Friendship is indeed one of those few states of which it is reasonable to wish the continuance through life.

Of the changes in Lichfield during this time the one which came home to Johnson most keenly was, of course, the death of his mother. To Lucy Porter he wrote on Saturday, January 20, 1759:

I will, if it be possible, come down to you. God grant I may yet [find] my dear mother breathing and sensible. Do not tell her lest I disappoint her. If I miss to write next post, I am on the road.

But the journey was a long and expensive one and Johnson did not make it. On the same day he was writing in urgent terms to Strahan, the printer, for an advance of thirty pounds upon his projected *Rasselas*. But the money did not come in time. On the 23rd, after Mrs Johnson's death, he wrote to Lucy Porter:

I shall send a bill of twenty pounds in a few days, which I thought to have brought to my mother; but God suffered it not. I have not power or composure to say much more. God bless you and bless us all.

Johnson advised that Lucy should continue to live in the old house with Catherine Chambers, Mrs Johnson's old servant who had been with the family for thirty-five years. "Kitty", wrote Johnson, "may carry on the trade for herself, keeping her own stock apart, and laying aside any money that she receives for any of the goods her good mistress has left behind her." Miss Porter agreed and shortly afterwards Johnson suggested that Kitty should take over the stock, clear her mistress's account and begin her own. Johnson was naturally homesick about this time. He implored Lucy on March 1 to write to him at least once a week, since he was "very desolate" and "loth to be universally forgotten". Lucy was prompt to respond to this appeal, but characteristically Johnson failed to

keep up his share of the correspondence. On May 10 he apologised for his failure. He had been very well, he said, but hindered, he knew not how, from writing. He had made amends, however, by sending some books (no doubt copies of *Rasselas* among them), one for Lucy, one for her aunt Hunter, who had been with Mrs Johnson when she died, one for Mr Howard and one for Kitty.

At length, in the winter of 1761–2, Johnson revisited his native city. He had been a young man when he had seen it last and now he was 52. The changes which he found were not the changes of catastrophe but the normal changes of time and human mortality. Johnson's impressions were what one might expect:

> I found the streets [he wrote to Baretti] much narrower and shorter than I thought I had left them, inhabited by a new race of people to whom I was very little known. My play-fellows were grown old and forced me to suspect that I was no longer young. My only remaining friend has changed his principles and was become the tool of the predominant faction. My daughter-in-law from whom I expected most, and whom I met with sincere benevolence, has lost the beauty and gaiety of youth without having gained much of the wisdom of age. I wandered about for five days, and took the first convenient opportunity of returning to a place where, if there is not much happiness, there is at least such a diversity of good and evil, that slight vexations do not fix upon the heart.

Such to Johnson was the vanity of Lichfield wishes after an absence of twenty-four years. But there is nothing odd or surprising about his experience.

His friends had not grown old or changed their politics sooner than other people's.

It was in the summer of 1762 that Johnson was awarded his pension. He wrote to Lucy Porter to tell her the news on July 24, requesting her to "be so kind as to tell Kitty". On his next visit to Lichfield, where he spent three months in 1767, Johnson saw Kitty for the last time. Kneeling beside her death-bed he said a last short prayer for her.

> She told me [he said to Boswell] that to part was the greatest pain she had ever felt and that she hoped we should meet again in a better place. I expressed, with swelled eyes, and great emotion of tenderness, the same hopes. We kissed and parted. I humbly hope to meet again and to part no more.

A loss of this kind did not add to the gaiety of Johnson's visit.

Lucy Porter, however, was "more kind and civil" than he expected and he made a point of looking for the house of his old nurse Mrs Marklew in George Lane. His statement in a letter to Mrs Thrale that his visit did not bring him one day of pleasure cannot be taken too seriously, since he saw something of Miss Elizabeth Aston and urged her to live a less solitary life. "Some lady," he wrote to her afterwards, "surely might be found, in whose conversation you might delight, and in whose fidelity you might repose."

Boswell expressed surprise at Johnson's remark that he grew tired of his stay before it came to an end:

> *Boswell.* I wonder at that, Sir, it is your native place.
> *Johnson.* Why, so is Scotland *your* native place.

Furthermore, it was in this year that, the lease of Michael Johnson's house having expired, the Corporation resolved that it should be renewed to his son for a further term of ninety years at the old rent of 2*s.* 6*d.* per annum, without payment of a fine.

From this time forward Johnson visited Lichfield with much greater regularity. In August 1769 he rejoiced to find that Lucy had kept her best gooseberries on the tree for him, and he was "neither too proud nor too wise" to gather them. But in George Lane he found that a terrible act of vandalism had been committed. "Evelyn," he wrote, "tells us of wicked men that cut down trees and never prospered afterwards; yet nothing has deterred these audacious aldermen from violating the Hamadryads of George Lane." The ladingwell in the same street he found to be shamefully neglected; in Stow Street, on the other hand, a pump had been erected.

In writing of such details Johnson was conscious, as a Londoner, of the danger of boring his correspondents with a superfluity of local colour. To write to Mrs Thrale about Lichfield, he said, was of no use since she had never seen Stow-pool or Borowcop-hill.

On his visit in 1770 Johnson was disappointed to find Miss Aston away from home. He had thus no incentive to make his daily climb to Stow Hill; but on the other hand he found consolation in Mrs Cobb's strawberries and cherries. Bad weather

kept him in the house a good deal, but Johnson was more placid than usual. He neither "frolicked nor fretted", and Miss Porter complained that there was no such thing as getting him off his chair. The story of the next two visits in 1771 and 1772 is much the same—a call from Mrs Cobb, a visit to Miss Aston, another tree cut down, a rise in the price of malt.

> Did you think [wrote Johnson to Mrs Thrale] there had been yet left a city in England where the gain of fifty pounds in a year would be mentioned with emphasis?

But the Staffordshire canal, which Johnson crossed on his way to Ashbourne, moved him to profound admiration as

> one of the great efforts of human labour, and human contrivance; which from the bridge on which I viewed it, passed away on either side and loses itself in distant regions, uniting waters that nature had divided and dividing lands which nature had united.

1773 was the year of Johnson's tour to the Hebrides and 1774 that of his tour to North Wales with Mr and Mrs Thrale. On July 6 of the latter year the travellers arrived at the Swan Hotel. On the next morning Johnson protested against Mrs Thrale's costume. He would not take her round the city, he said, unless she changed her travelling-dress. Properly garbed, Mrs Thrale was taken to see the cathedral, Mr Green's Museum, Mr Newton's china, Lucy Porter, Mrs Cobb, Miss Aston, Peter Garrick, Anna Seward, Erasmus Darwin and other Lichfield worthies.

By this time Johnson is beginning to refer to his "annual ramble into the middle counties", and of his 1775 visit his account is perhaps a little more cheerful. Mrs Thrale, he says, left a favourable impression behind her; Lucy Porter's gout is so bad that she cannot dress herself; daily visits are made to Stow Hill, where he finds Mrs Gastrell as well as Miss Aston, and gets "good words and cherries and strawberries" and is generally pampered. It was on this visit, possibly, that Johnson was very late for a large party which had been invited to meet him at Stow Hill. After the dinner had waited far beyond the usual hour and the company were at length sitting down, Johnson appeared at the gate.

> He stood for some time in deep contemplation, and at length began to climb it, and having succeeded in clearing it, advanced with hasty strides towards the house. On his arrival Mrs Gastrell asked him "if he had forgotten that there was a small gate for foot passengers by the side of the carriage entrance". "No, my dear lady, by no means," replied the Doctor, "but I had a mind to try whether I could climb a gate now as I used to do when I was a lad."

Johnson comments upon the number of box-clubs, that is, of provident societies, in the city. The women, in particular, have one known as the Amicable Society, to which each member pays twopence a week; "the subscribers", says Johnson, "are always quarrelling; and every now and then a lady in a fume withdraws her name"; nevertheless the Society had £100 in hand, and on an

appointed day the members walked in procession from the town-hall to the cathedral to hear a sermon, all wearing linen gowns and carrying sticks mounted with acorns.

Of the triviality of provincial gossip Johnson is still good-humouredly scornful: Lady Smith's new post-chaise is a fruitful topic of conversation; Johnson has his leg pecked by Miss Aston's parrot and hears of it some time afterwards at Mrs Cobb's; Mrs Cobb, in her turn, gives Johnson sweetmeats at breakfast and he hears it talked about, a week later, at Stow Hill.

If you are for small talk...[he writes to Mrs Thrale] I could tell you about Lucy's two cats and Brill, her brother's old dog, who is gone deaf....But I have not yet had my dinner. I have begun early, for what would become of the nation if a letter of this importance should miss the post?...

Of Johnson's Midland ramble in 1776 the record is immeasurably more interesting, for the simple reason that it is the work of James Boswell. On March 19 the pair had taken their places in the Oxford coach and had come via Stratford-on-Avon and Henley in Arden to Birmingham where they arrived on Friday, March 22. Here they met Edmund Hector, Johnson's school-fellow, and in Hector's house Boswell saw Johnson "sitting placidly at tea with his *first love*". This was Hector's sister, now Mrs Careless, a clergyman's widow.

She was the first woman [Johnson told Boswell] with whom I was in love. It dropt out of my head

imperceptibly; but she and I shall always have a kindness for each other.... If I had married her, it might have been as happy for me.

Boswell. Pray, Sir, do you not suppose that there are fifty women in the world, with any one of whom a man may be as happy as with any one woman in particular?

Johnson. Ay, Sir, fifty thousand.

Boswell would have liked to stay longer at Birmingham with a view to obtaining further biographical material from Mr Hector. But Johnson was impatient to reach his native city.

So we drove on that stage in the dark [writes Boswell] and were long pensive and silent. When we came within the focus of the Lichfield lamps, "Now (said he) we are getting out of a state of death".

At the Three Crowns they had a comfortable supper and got into high spirits. Boswell felt all his Toryism glow in the old capital of Staffordshire and indulged in libations of that ale which had been immortalised by Farquhar as "smooth as oil, sweet as milk, clear as amber, and strong as brandy".

Such was the propitious beginning of the visit and the succeeding pages in Boswell's narrative are as good as anything in the *Life*. By himself in Lichfield, Johnson was wont in his letters to his friends to affect a metropolitan superiority and to assure them that he saw provincial affairs in their true proportion. Once he has Boswell with him, on the other hand, he swells with native pride and patriotism. Lichfield people are the most sober,

decent people in England, the genteelest in proportion to their wealth and the purest spoken; they are philosophers who work with their heads, while the boobies of Birmingham work for them with their hands.

On the Saturday morning after their arrival, the round of visits was begun. First, Boswell was presented to Lucy Porter, who had recently been left a fortune of £10,000 by her brother and had spent a great part of it on a new house with a handsome garden. Peter Garrick, who was next visited, invited the two travellers to stay with him, but Johnson would not desert his friend Wilkins, of the Three Crowns. Boswell was struck by the resemblance between Peter Garrick and his brother, and Johnson maintained that with proper cultivation Peter's vivacity would not have been inferior to David's. To dinner at the Three Crowns Johnson invited Jackson, who had been at school with him fifty years before. To Boswell he seemed to be

> a low man, dull and untaught. He had a coarse grey coat, black waistcoat, greasy leather breeches, and a yellow uncurled wig; and his countenance had the ruddiness which betokens one who is in no haste to "leave his can".

He had failed as a cutler in Birmingham and was now engaged on a scheme for an improved method of dressing leather. Johnson's patience in listening to Jackson's rigmarole was duly noted and applauded by Boswell, as was also the obliging alacrity of the apothecary, Mr Richard Green, in

showing his museum of "antiquities and natural curiosities and ingenious works of art", each distinguished by a neat label printed at the press of the proprietor.

At the time of this visit there was a company of players performing at Lichfield. The manager begged leave to wait on Johnson and Johnson invited him to drink a glass of wine. They chatted about Garrick and Johnson proposed to Boswell that for the Monday evening on which they were to be at the theatre he should write a special prologue—"A Prologue by James Boswell Esq. from the Hebrides". Boswell liked the suggestion. He felt that "Prologue, spoken before Dr Samuel Johnson at Lichfield 1776" might sound just as well as "Prologue spoken before the Duke of York at Oxford" had sounded a hundred years before. He could have demonstrated how much Lichfield had done for Shakespeare by producing Johnson and Garrick. But Johnson had not been serious and refused to support Boswell's enthusiasm. However, when the Monday came round, they had a merry evening: the Town Hall had been converted into a temporary theatre and they saw *Theodosius*, together with *The Stratford Jubilee*. Boswell rejoiced to see Johnson

> sitting in a conspicuous part of the pit and receiving affectionate homage from all his acquaintance.

Johnson was reminded by this association with the Lichfield theatre of another of his early loves.

Forty years ago, Sir, [he said to Boswell] I was in love with an actress here, Mrs Emmet, who acted Flora in *Hob of the Well*.

Perhaps he remembered also that other night in the Lichfield play-house on which, having found his chair between the side-scenes uncivilly usurped by a stranger, he had seized the chair and tossed both it and its occupant into the pit.

At Peter Garrick's Boswell was presented to Miss Aston and on the Sunday he breakfasted in company with Johnson at Mrs Cobb's, noting with pleasure the "kindness and easy pleasantry" with which Johnson treated his old friend and her niece, Miss Adey. While Johnson went to Mattins with Mrs Cobb at St Mary's, Boswell went to the Cathedral where he was delighted to find the music "peculiarly solemn and accordant with the words of the service". In the afternoon he was again in the Cathedral, this time in company with Johnson himself.

It was grand and pleasing [he wrote] to contemplate this illustrious writer, now full of fame, worshipping in the solemn temple of his native city.

The Sunday evening was spent with the Reverend Thomas Seward, Canon Residentiary, who was living in the Bishop's palace. Boswell describes him as a "genteel well-bred dignified clergyman" as well as "an ingenious and literary man", editor of Beaumont and Fletcher and author of verses in Dodsley's collection. He was the father, of course, of Anna Seward, whom Boswell now

met for the first time. On the Monday Boswell felt somewhat aggrieved when Johnson walked away to dine with the ladies at Stow Hill, Miss Aston and Mrs Gastrell, without making any apology or explanation. He soon found, however, that he had misjudged his friend, as he shortly afterwards received a note in Johnson's hand:

> Mrs Gastrel, at the lower house on Stow Hill, desires Mr Boswell's company to dinner at two.

Boswell's good humour was at once restored, and he rejoiced to find what a reputation for amiability Johnson had amongst those who knew him best. In the evening Johnson entertained Mr Seward and Mr Pearson at supper at the Three Crowns and after their departure he and Boswell sat up as late as they commonly did in London. On the following day there arrived Dr Taylor's large roomy post-chaise, and "four stout, plump horses" driven by "two steady, jolly postillions" conveyed the travellers to Ashbourne.

Such is Boswell's record of his Lichfield week-end. The general impression which it leaves of interest and good humour and gaiety is in marked contrast with the gloomy commonplace which bulks large in Johnson's own commentaries on his Midland rambles. The contrast is a good illustration of the infectious quality of Boswell's incorrigible good humour; it makes it easy to understand why Johnson, after a few months' acquaintance, had accompanied his friend in the stage-coach to Harwich and also why he had been induced to

make the much more ambitious expedition to Scotland. In 1777 Johnson was again in Lichfield. Having no Boswell with him to keep late hours at the Three Crowns, he finds the place "more and more barren of entertainment". Harry Jackson, his old friend, is dead and at Stow Hill he finds "a collection of misery—Mrs Aston paralytick, Mrs Walmsley lame, Mrs Hervey blind"; Mrs Gastrell is very angry at the prevailing fashion of dress and feathers and wraps her head in a towel as a protest; he himself is badly troubled by faintness and shortness of breath and is trying a "great experiment with ipecacuanha"; he dines, however, with the Corporation and makes a speech against a proposed workhouse; he also comments favourably on the appointment of Dean Proby, who has "the manners of a gentleman and some spirit of discipline, which brings the cathedral into better method".

Of the week which Johnson spent at Lichfield in 1779 the greater part was passed at Stow Hill. On one of his visits there he met Brodhurst, a playfellow of his infancy, and gave him a guinea. Shortness of breath still troubled him, but he enjoyed a drive in Miss Aston's chaise.

In 1780 Johnson omitted to make his annual journey but was determined not to miss it again in the following year: in particular he looked forward, though not very confidently, to being made better by some serious conversation with Edmund Hector and also to setting a good example by "frequent

attendance on publick worship" at his native city. Accordingly he arrived at Lichfield in October and found everybody as kind as he expected and Lucy kinder than ever. Lucy, however, had been very ill and Miss Aston was partly paralysed. Neither of them, according to Johnson, ate enough food. Johnson himself was "visibly disordered" and a medical man, after just seeing him in church, sent him some pills. At the beginning of November he found "the autumnal blast sharp and nipping and the fading world an uncomfortable prospect". On the last day of October he had, "to scatter the gloom", attended the Lichfield ball. It was a very gay scene. Johnson "looked awhile and went away".

Of his last summer Johnson spent the greater part in the Midlands. On July 13 he left London for Lichfield, reading the *Ciceronianus* of Erasmus in the coach. He finished it as he entered Lichfield on the 15th and stayed five days in the city. Being unable to walk, he got no great pleasure from the visit, and went on to Ashbourne in the hope that the air and attention there would do him good. Windham came to see him while he was there and early in September he was well enough to make an excursion to Chatsworth, where the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire "honestly pressed" him to stay. Johnson, however, felt that a sick man was not a fit inmate of a great house. By the middle of September he was growing weary of the solitude—a solitude partially relieved by his having the luck

to borrow *Anecdotes of William Bowyer*—of Ashbourne and hankering after Lichfield, where there was "less convenience" but "more society". So, as Boswell says, "we now behold Johnson for the last time in his native city", very infirm and dropsical, but still living on in hope and looking forward to some cheerful hours at his club on his return to London. In the meantime he felt, as Boswell says, a "revival of all the tenderness of filial affection" for his native city, and paid special attention to the repair of the gravestone in the Cathedral of Elizabeth Blaney, the young woman who had died for love of Michael Johnson.[1] Miss Seward gives an account of Johnson's appearance at this time, which is probably more trustworthy than others of her anecdotes:

> A few days since I was to drink tea with him, by his request, at Mrs Porter's. When I went into the room, he was in deep but agitated slumber, in an arm-chair. Opening the door with that caution due to the sick, he did not awaken at my entrance...upon the servant entering to announce the arrival of a gentleman of the University, introduced by Mr White, he awoke with convulsive starts—but rising, with more alacrity than could have been expected, he said "Come, my dear lady, let you and I attend these gentlemen in the study". He received them with more than usual complacence; but whimsically chose to get astride upon his chair-seat, with his face to its back, keeping a trotting motion as if on horseback; but, in this odd

[1] The higher criticism of Mr Aleyn Lyell Reade has demonstrated the difficulty of accepting this as authentic, but the story is pretty enough to be "emancipated from the bonds of fact".

position, he poured forth streams of eloquence, illumined by frequent flashes of wit and humour, without any tincture of malignity.

Miss Seward thought it "not improbable that this literary comet may *set* where it *rose*, and Lichfield receive his pale and stern remains"; Boswell, too, thought that Johnson might have chosen to remain in Lucy Porter's house.

But [he goes on] there was in him an animated and lofty spirit, and however complicated diseases might depress ordinary mortals, all who saw him, beheld and acknowledged the *invictum animum Catonis*.... And such was his love of London...that he languished when absent from it...and, therefore, although at Lichfield, surrounded with friends, who loved and revered him, and for whom he had a very sincere affection, he still found that such conversation as London affords, could be found no where else.

Of the Lichfield friends who remained, Miss Aston and Mrs Gastrell stood highest in Johnson's affection, and though his courage still stood high, he could not face saying good-bye to Stow Hill. Instead he sent a letter, probably the last he wrote in Lichfield:

Mr Johnson sends his compliments to the Ladies at Stow Hill, of whom he would have taken a more formal leave, but that he was willing to spare a ceremony, which he hopes would have been no pleasure to them, and would have been painful to himself.

So by way of Birmingham and Oxford, Johnson returned to London on November 16. Less than a month of life was left to him, but Lichfield was in his thoughts to the end. On December 2 he wrote to Mr Green enclosing an epitaph for his father,

mother and brother, to be engraved in large size in the middle aisle in St Michael's Church.

> Let the stone [he wrote] be deep, massy, and hard; and do not let the difference of ten pounds, or more, defeat our purpose.

To Lucy Porter he wrote on the same day telling her of what he had done and also of the stone he had laid over his wife's grave at Bromley:

> That this is done, I thought it fit that you should know. What care will be taken of us, who can tell? May God pardon and bless us, for Jesus Christ's sake.

In Lichfield, as elsewhere, such care has been taken of Johnsonian memorials as would have overwhelmed Johnson himself with grateful amazement. The story of his connection with his native city is the record of a changing point of view. Primarily, Johnson's ambitions were those of a scholar; he left Lichfield, not because he felt that he would be happier elsewhere, but because he could find no successful scholastic employment there. When he came to London, he found not only that he could just make a living as a man of letters but that the city afforded him a wealth of social interest and intercourse beyond comparison with that of a provincial town.

> So high a relish had he [as Boswell says] of its magnificent extent and variety of intellectual entertainment, that he languished when absent from it, his mind having become quite luxurious from the long habit of enjoying the metropolis.

It was not that Lichfield was forgotten. Was it not immortalised in the *Dictionary* itself? But it was a long way off—a journey not of three, but of

thirty hours, and when Johnson was at length free to make the journey both he and the city had changed. Like every man who visits his old home or his old college after an absence of twenty-five years, Johnson irrationally expected to find everyone and everything the same. Gradually adjusting himself to new conditions, he picked up old and began to weave new threads of association and friendship; but his point of view was inevitably that of a Londoner on a visit. The standard by which Johnson judged a society was the standard of intellectual conversation. It was because good talk was wanting that he grew weary of the material comfort of Ashbourne; but at Stow Hill and elsewhere in Lichfield he could fold his legs and have his talk out with as much freedom as he could at Streatham or at the Mitre. In the letters written during his Lichfield visits Johnson consciously and rather elaborately adopts the rôle of the Londoner who is struck by the pettiness of provincial affairs. Had Boswell more often accompanied him, the whole picture of Johnson at Lichfield would be in truer proportion, for Johnson's pride in the city came out most strongly when he had a stranger before whom to display it. His attitude towards it was not unlike his attitude to David Garrick; he would allow no one to criticise it but himself. Of his abiding loyalty to his oldest friends there can be no doubt and not a few of Johnson's happiest hours were spent after he had come within the focus of the Lichfield lamps.

TWO IMITATIONS

I

MRS PIOZZI ON BOZZY'S LETTERS

[A letter that might have been written if Boswell's *Letters*, published by the Clarendon Press under the editorship of Professor C. B. Tinker, had appeared about 1820 instead of in 1924.]

WILL my dear Madam d'Arblay forgive me if I ask for her opinion of the book of which all the world is talking so persistently? Mr Boswell's *Letters* have appeared, and how poignantly the two volumes have brought to the mind of *one* reader, at least, the memory of her *dear* Dr Johnson.

Of course I looked first to see whether the impudent creature had included in his collection any of the letters he addressed to *me*. Nor did I look in vain. In one letter I find that he acknowledges the "happy hours" which he owed to me. He invariably thought of me, forsooth, "with admiration and gratitude". But in truth he never wrote to me save with *one* object—namely, to gather what material he could for that two-guinea book over which many years ago I laughed and cried by turns.

Even before my *Letters* were published I find that he was shamelessly looking over the printer's shoulder while they were still in *proof*, and having seen Letter cccxxx in this horrible, *underhand* manner, was pleased to write to Dr Percy that people might "expect much entertainment" from

the volume. So they did—and if the *truth* can be entertaining, they were not disappointed.

Poor Mr Boswell! I can think of him now without malice, though I fear he was a sad rake—and his letters to his friend Mr Temple contain some *shocking* passages, passages which have brought a blush to the faded cheek of H.L.P. No wonder Mr Temple reproved him for *being indelicate in the choice of his female friends*. What, therefore, was my astonishment at Mr B.'s assumption of the manner of a preceptour of morality! What does Madam d'Arblay think of this advice addressed to a minx whom he calls Zelide?

> No, Zelide, whatever men may do, a woman without virtue is terrible. Excuse me for talking so freely. I know you mean no harm, you gave way to your fancy.... Fy, my Zelide, what fancies are these? Is a mistress half so agreeable a name as a wife? Is a connection of love merely equal to a connection strengthened by a variety of circumstances which have a pleasing influence on a sound mind? I beseech you never indulge such ideas. Respect mankind. Respect the institutions of society....

Yet this was the man who even in his *very first* letter to me averred that before being fixed in his choice of a wife he had been guilty of *much inconstancy*, and Heaven knows that poor Mr Temple was not spared even the most *disgusting* detail of his amorous adventures. How ridiculous, too, he made himself over the Corsican affair and over his interview with Rousseau!

But what is even more amusing, and yet pa-

thetick, to me is his too, too childish pride in winning the friendship of Mr Johnson.

On Wednesday evening Mr Johnson and I had another *tête-a-tête* at the Mitre. Would you believe that we sat from half an hour after eight till between two and three? He took me cordially by the hand; and said, "My dear Boswell, I love you very much". Can I help being somewhat vain?

Would *I* believe, indeed, that Johnson sat talking until two or three?

You, dear Madam, know well how I injured my own health not a little by frequently sitting up with Johnson and making tea for him until *four* o'clock in the morning.

"Could he help being somewhat vain?" No, indeed, I trow not, though there are others with much greater excuse for vanity in this regard who did a little perhaps to curb the ebullitions of that foolish passion, rather than make such a *ludicrous* exhibition as poor Mr Boswell does.

Mr Boswell is mightily pleased with his "talent for recording conversation". Madam d'Arblay at any rate cannot have forgotten how comical a scene was enacted when he was turned out of his chair at Streatham to make room for Dr Johnson's *dear Fanny* and how, when he came behind Johnson's chair with his note-book ready, Johnson was *so* angry and called out: "What do you do there, Sir? Go to the table, Sir!"

But Boswell surpasses even his own self-complacency when he boasts of his superiority over *all* other biographers.

"It appears to me that mine is the best plan of biography that can be conceived", he writes to Dr Percy, and he re-iterates this opinion to Mr Temple:

> I am absolutely certain that *my* mode of biography, which gives not only a *history* of Johnson's *visible* progress through the world, and of his publications, but a *view* of his mind, in his letters and conversations is the most perfect that can be conceived, and will be *more* of a *Life* than any work that has ever yet appeared.

And after this what is the sentence which *immediately* follows?

> I have been wretchedly dissipated, so that I have not written a line for a fortnight.

Truly, Mr Boswell was a remarkable creature.

> **Biographer and libertine**
> **Was ever yet such *Candour* seen?**

But my dear Madam d'Arblay must not be wearied with these ramblings of an *Octogenary* pen. There are many things which that pen would love to correct, but as Doctor Johnson said, the world is little solicitous to know whence proceeded the faults of that which it condemns. And nearly every one of that dear Streatham world is dead now except

Your poor little

H. L. P.

CORSICA RE-VISITED

[Being an imaginary review of Miss Dorothy Archer's *Corsica, the Scented Isle.*]

TALKING one day at the Club, my revered friend, Doctor Johnson, remarked, with that directness that was characteristick of him, that "all travellers generally mean to tell truth".

As one who, in that spirit of eager adventure which is among the most engaging qualities of youth, has travelled extensively over the continent of Europe, I hope I may with safety aver that truth of narrative has ever been my foremost aim in such records as I have myself preserved—whether of my expedition to the Hebrides in company with the Rambler, or of those peregrinations which led me to the home of the illustrious Paoli.

It is therefore with something more than customary pleasure that I have lately received a pleasant volume (though printed on too coarse a paper to be deemed truly elegant) describing, with much profusion of detail, that romantick island with which some of the most edifying incidents in my own career are associated.

In one respect Miss Archer has indeed been more fortunate than James Boswell: she has, as she acquaints us in her *Preface*, known the island for twelve years; whereas I must perforce be content with the felicitous recollections of a sojourn of some six months. None the less, I still dare, as I dared in writing at the time to my illustrious preceptour, to call my journey a *spirited tour*.

The title of the work at present under considera-

tion—*Corsica, the Scented Isle*—is in itself such as to recall to me with extream vividness my own youthful impressions; for readers of my *Account of Corsica* will not have forgotten that I at once remarked how "the odour of the myrtle and other aromatick shrubs and flowers that grew around me was very refreshing".

Again, I have myself recorded how, as my companions and I satisfied our natural cravings with chestnuts that fell from the trees and with water that ran in the brook by our side, we seemed to belong to the "prisca gens mortalium, the primitive race of men". Miss Archer, at an early stage of her narrative, animadverts upon this topick with an admirable directness: "One of the greatest charms of Corsica, to my mind, is the lack of cultivation. One can walk where one likes...." Though there may be some who would cavil at this claim for an unbridled freedom of peregrination on the part of a female, I cannot withhold an expression of gratification at the sensibility of our authoress to that specifick charm of natural simplicity which the island of Corsica has continually exerted upon its admirers.

Miss Archer, moreover, has anticipated the objections that might be brought against this freedom by an entertaining account of the activities of such bandits as still survive in the island. It would appear that the Corsicans themselves are still either unwilling, or afraid, to assist in bringing these fellows to justice. There was, one indeed, quite lately, who actually "lived in the garden of a noted

official from Bastia, for whom he fished trout in exchange for his supper". But, with regard to such strangers as make a tour in the island, we are informed that "one is perfectly safe, there is no danger whatsoever for a foreigner". This, again, affords an instructive confirmation of the assurance vouchsafed to me by my obliging friend, Count Rivarola, that "in the rudest times no Corsican would ever attack a stranger".

Another incident recorded in Miss Archer's book not only reveals an exquisite trait of Corsican character, but evokes in my own mind a lively recollection of the time when, clad in a Corsican dress and armed with pistols (a gift from Paoli himself), I was saluted by the soldiery of the island as the "ambasciadore Inglese": "Returning one day from a long walk," writes Miss Archer, "dusty and dishevelled, with short skirts and heavy-nailed boots, our way lay across the parade ground, where the entire garrison (apparently) was drilling. The officer in charge lined up his men, and kept them stiffly at attention as we passed. The parade ground seemed to stretch for miles as we passed the long lines of rigid men!" Had I been present on this occasion, I flatter myself that I should have conducted myself with a becoming dignity; just as, when, in company with Johnson, I had the pleasure of waiting upon the 37th regiment at Fort George, I fancied myself for a little while to be a truly military man.

Having myself been the guest of the Franciscans at their convent at Corte, it is similarly gratifying

to read in Miss Archer's narrative how the solitary Franciscan who now inhabits the Convent de la Trinité is still delighted to welcome visitors and to conduct them over his exiguous domain.

But the circumstance which is to me the source of the deepest satisfaction is that the memory of the gallant Paoli is still preserved throughout the island. At Corte, in particular, the Cours Paoli (the principal street) and the Place Paoli, in which an elegant statue of the great patriot has been erected, worthily commemorate his name; and Miss Archer, in a succinct account of the General's career, in the course of which I am gratified to remark a complimentary allusion to my own travels in the island, fitly describes him as "the man who brought liberty to Corsica".

If I may be permitted to comment upon what appear to be two not inconsiderable defects of the book, I would respectfully call attention to the absence of a map (a feature upon which, in my own volume, I expended a particular care); and to the meagre nature of the *Index*, which falls a long way short of doing justice to the fullness of the narrative. Nevertheless, it would be ungallant—and therefore foreign to my character—to conclude this review of Miss Archer's work upon a note of censure. I will therefore beg leave to assure her that to no critick has her book been a source of livelier satisfaction than to

Her obliged and most obedient humble servant,

JAMES BOSWELL.

III

LORD MACAULAY

THE PRE-EMINENT VICTORIAN

LORD MACAULAY

THE PRE-EMINENT VICTORIAN

THE seriousness of the effort now being made to discover and appreciate the *ethos* of the Victorian Age is a noteworthy fact of current criticism. But a few years ago we used the phrase "Victorianism" merely as a contemptuous synonym for middle-class respectability; to-day it is a favourite topic not only for casual gossip, but for serious discussion, even for professorial lectures. Victorianism, indeed, has already assumed the dignity of an historical phase; there is every indication that a few years hence it will have acquired the solemnity of a cult. This development is largely, I suppose, a time-process. Even I, a somewhat late Victorian, find it difficult to remember, when discussing the matter with undergraduates, that none of them lived under the dominion of the great Queen—and yet, to the children of my generation it seemed impossible that Victoria should die, that the word "King" should come into the Book of Common Prayer, that distinguished advocates should put anything but "Q.C." after their names; and when the impossible happened, we listened wonderingly while our elders went about and said to each other in all seriousness: "Don't you feel as if you had lost a mother?"

But now Victorianism is something different. It is no longer just the besetting sin of one's parents.

As it becomes more and more remote, it gathers round it all the interest of a past civilisation, all the picturesqueness of the antique.

This change of perspective is exemplified in a hundred ways:

An old gentleman is described as "a picturesque figure in side-whiskers who goes into the city every day in a top-hat"; the top-hat, it should be noted, is now accounted to the old gentleman for aesthetic righteousness—it gives him "character". A generation ago it would have stamped him as a Philistine.

Similarly, with Mid-Victorian furniture, while we may still contend that the bulk of it is intrinsically ugly, it is gradually becoming fashionable to qualify such condemnation by a good word for the sound workmanship, the solidity, the quality of the material. The horsehair sofa is no longer merely antiquated; it is antique—and, before I die, I am prepared to hear a collector talk enthusiastically about a genuine 1870 antimacassar.

Everywhere we may note this larger geniality now displayed towards the Victorian Age: Mr Michael Sadleir, in his noble championship of Trollope, finds himself in honesty compelled to defend the Mid-Victorian England which Trollope represented; Mr Laurence Housman, in his imaginary dialogues, cherishes, with sentimental care, what he describes as the bloom upon the Victorian grape; even the ironic spirit of Mr Lytton Strachey

seems to suffer a sea change under the influence of the study of Victoria herself.

But it is time to recall Mr Sadleir's very salutary warning against loose talk about "Victorianism" as a whole. What profit, indeed, can there be in any attempt to affix a common label to the work, say, of John Stuart Mill, Robert Browning, and Mr Max Beerbohm?

But if we limit ourselves to the period of Early Victorianism (that is, the period 1837 to 1850), we may at any rate be able to discern certain foundations of the social and political philosophy of the period; and the broadest of these foundations were Decency and *Laissez-faire*.[1]

Of the Early Victorian standard of decency it may be said first, that it represented a reaction against the jovial licence of social life in the eighteenth century and in the Regency period; and secondly, that it was maintained at its full height by the influence of the Evangelical movement and the influence of the Court life of Victoria herself. It was not that the Early Victorian reader was incapable of enjoying, say, *Tom Jones*; but his enjoyment was subject to those qualifications which were codified by Thackeray in his *Lectures on the English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*. What no Early Victorian could understand was Fielding's own claim that in *Tom Jones* the reader would find

[1] Mr J. M. Keynes has written a pamphlet entitled *The End of Laissez-Faire*; the End of Decency (in the Victorian sense) was the subject of a recent pamphlet by Mr D. H. Lawrence.

"nothing inconsistent with the strictest Rules of Decency". The Rules had been altered; and perhaps one of the simplest illustrations of their revision is to be found in a comparison between the description of Mr Pickwick's famous adventure with a middle-aged lady in yellow curl-papers at the Great White Horse at Ipswich and Fielding's description of how the hapless Parson Adams climbed inadvertently into Mrs Slipslop's bed. It is not a question of the ethical superiority of the Early Victorians. Parson Adams was at least as good a moralist as Mr Pickwick. The change lies in the matter of decency.

Laissez-faire was, of course, the central doctrine of the political philosophy of the Early Victorians. Jeremy Bentham, in his formulation of his theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the measure of right and wrong, laid the foundations of that social and political structure which was subsequently built by the philosophic Radicals and the economists of the Manchester School.

Early Victorian Liberalism did not, indeed, blindly follow in the Benthamite path, but it remained loyal to the basic principles of Utility, Democracy, and Individual Liberty; and when the Victorians were confronted with demands for change, which had been intensified, though not created, by international and economic upheaval, their answer was in effect what their greatest poet was to say in another context: "Let us alone"—let us alone to buy in the cheapest and sell in the

dearest market; let us be free of trade-restrictions and you shall have things cheap; let us alone—and enlightened self-interest, the stimulus of competition, and a Parliamentary vote will do the rest.

Now it is significant that many of the famous names which are at once suggested by the mention of the Early Victorian period are, as a matter of fact, associated not with a glorification of, but with a violent attack upon, the theory and practice of *Laissez-faire*. Carlyle and Ruskin regarded it as the greatest of social stumbling-blocks; Newman looked upon Liberalism as the broad end of the atheistic wedge; and, at a rather later date, Matthew Arnold traced the more noisome weeds of Philistinism to the seeds sown by Early and Mid-Victorian Radicals. Even Dickens and Tennyson had misgivings about what Carlyle had called the Condition-of-England Question. Honest doubt, if not open scepticism, about the glory and the greatness of the Victorian Age, very frequently coloured the attitude of the greatest of the Victorians themselves.

But if we look for the expression of a rosy faith in Early Victorian England, of a joyous thankfulness for having lived in so glorious an epoch, there is at any rate one exponent of the faith, whose work lies ready to our hand—I mean the pre-eminent figure of Thomas Babington Macaulay.

Macaulay's early days were spent in the right Evangelical atmosphere. Zachary Macaulay, his

father, was a prominent member of the Clapham Sect and the intimate friend and colleague of Wilberforce, Buxton, and other leaders of the Abolitionist movement. It is with little surprise that we learn that the elder Macaulay frowned upon novel-reading—especially before noon. Dram-drinking in the morning, he called it.

One feels that eighteenth-century fiction, in particular, must have been a source of some heart-searching to Zachary Macaulay, and it must be set down to his credit that when, as editor of a journal called *The Christian Observer*, he received an anonymous contribution eulogising the works of Fielding and Smollett, he had the magnanimity to print it. Down upon the editorial head came the violent wrath of his subscribers; one of them announced his intention not only of ceasing to take the paper, but of consigning the offensive number to the flames. Meanwhile the editor had learned that the guilty contributor was his own thirteen-year-old son. On the face of it this may seem to suggest a divergence on the part of the Macaulays from the Victorian standard of decency. But here Macaulay's attitude was qualified by his literary voracity—an attitude defined at a later date in his essay on the Restoration dramatists.

It would perhaps be unjustifiable to claim infant precocity as a peculiarly Victorian quality, though there are few records more staggering in this respect than those of Ruskin and John Stuart Mill. Certainly Macaulay can vie with the most notorious

of nursery prodigies. A literary critic at the age of thirteen, he was a poet at the age of seven, and the manuscript of one of the many hymns referred to by his mother in a letter written in 1808 has since been reproduced:

> Almighty God of all below,
> Thou canst protect from every foe;
> The Heavens are made by thy great hands,
> One word of thee the Earth commands.
>
> Some men make Gods of red and blue
> And rob their Sovereign of his due:
> The good shall go to Heaven. The fell
> Blasts of thy wrath can bear to hell.

It is perhaps not altogether fanciful to note as characteristic both the ease with which the infant hymnologist divides mankind into two classes and the sureness with which he forecasts their respective destinies.

Macaulay was not sent to a public school, but to a private establishment at Little Shelford, kept by a clergyman, the strictness of whose Evangelicalism was above suspicion, though certain elements of geniality were admitted into the sacred gloom of the Early Victorian Sabbath:

> My dear Papa [wrote Thomas on April 26, 1813],
>
> Since I have given you a detail of weekly duties, I hope you will be pleased to be informed of my Sunday's occupations. It is quite a day of rest here, and I really look to it with pleasure through the whole of the week. After breakfast we learn a chapter in the Greek Testament, that is with the aid of our Bibles, and without doing it with a dictionary like other lessons.

We then go to church. We dine almost as soon as we come back, and we are left to ourselves till afternoon church. During this time I employ myself in reading, and Mr Preston lends me any books for which I ask him, so that I am nearly as well off in this respect as at home, except for one thing, which, though I believe it is useful, is not very pleasant. I can only ask for one book at a time, and cannot touch another till I have read it through. We then go to church, and after we come back I read as before till tea-time. After tea we write out the sermon. I cannot help thinking that Mr Preston uses all imaginable means to make us forget it, for he gives us a glass of wine each on Sunday, and on Sunday only, the very day when we want to have all our faculties awake: and some do literally go to sleep during the sermon, and look rather silly when they wake. I, however, have not fallen into this disaster.

One further letter belonging to Macaulay's schoolboy period deserves quotation as showing the extraordinarily mature view which he took of current history. He writes from Shelford on April 11, 1814:

My dear Mama,

The news is glorious indeed. Peace! Peace with a Bourbon, with a descendant of Henri Quatre, with a prince who is bound to us by all the ties of gratitude. I have some hopes that it will be a lasting peace; that the troubles of the last twenty years may make kings and nations wiser. I cannot conceive a greater punishment to Buonaparte than that which the allies have inflicted on him. How can his ambitious mind support it? All his great projects and schemes, which once made every throne in Europe tremble, are buried in the solitude of an Italian isle. How miraculously everything has been conducted! We almost seem to hear the Almighty saying to the fallen tyrant, "For this

cause have I raised thee up, that I might show in thee My power".

There is here no question of pose. The letter was intended solely for the domestic circle; both the rhetoric and the dramatic view of history are entirely spontaneous and characteristic.

At the end of the letter he turns to another subject, the controversy between the Clapham sect and Dr Herbert Marsh:

I saw to-day that greatest of churchmen, that pillar of Orthodoxy, that true friend to the Liturgy, that mortal enemy to the Bible Society—Herbert Marsh, D.D., Professor of Divinity on Lady Margaret's foundation. I stood looking at him for about ten minutes, and shall always continue to maintain that he is a very ill-favoured gentleman as far as outward appearance is concerned.

At Trinity College, Cambridge, Macaulay was supremely happy—except for the Mathematics. Of the fellowship which he won in 1824 he was probably prouder than any other distinction which came to him in later life:

I can never remember the time [says his biographer] when it was not diligently impressed upon me that, if I minded my syntax, I might eventually hope to reach a position which would give me three hundred pounds a year, a stable for my horse, six dozen of audit ale every Christmas, a loaf and two pats of butter every morning, a good dinner for nothing, with as many almonds and raisins as I could eat at dessert.

Whether these Victorian attractions are still dangled before the eyes of aspirants to Trinity fellowships I do not stay to inquire.

Macaulay's subsequent career may be summed up in two words—Politics and Literature; in 1825 there appeared his first contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*—the essay on Milton—and in 1830 he entered Parliament. It was characteristic that with all his vast range of reading, his fine scholarship, his fluent style, and his early connection with the *Edinburgh Review*, Macaulay did not contemplate a purely literary career. The possibility of "writing to relieve not the fulness of the mind but the emptiness of the pocket" was abhorrent to him. At that time, moreover, the theory and the practice of politics held an attraction for brilliant young men which is rarely felt by the young lions of to-day. To the Victorians politics really mattered, and though Macaulay first made his mark in London by a critical essay on Milton, politics and political subjects quickly claimed him for their own. From Milton he turned to Machiavelli and Hallam and Southey and James Mill. As early as 1826 Crabb Robinson described him as "Overflowing with words and not poor in thought. Liberal in opinion, but no radical". Macaulay was thus eminently fitted to be a protagonist in the Reform Bill movement, and the fact that he distrusted the political theories of the Utilitarians, whose principles were at the bottom of much of the political development of the nineteenth century, does not make him any the less representative of his age. As Leslie Stephen said, "he ought by all his intellectual sympathies to be a Utilitarian";

but probably he distrusted their theories not so much because they were Utilitarian, as because they were theories. Macaulay, indeed, was ashamed of the youthful arrogance of his attack upon James Mill and suppressed the essays; but one sentence from the end of the second essay is worth quoting:

> Our fervent wish and we will add our sanguine hope is that we may see such a reform in the House of Commons as may render its votes the express image of the opinion of the middle orders of Britain.

Similarly in the essay on Hallam, Macaulay wrote:

> A great statesman might, by judicious and timely reformations, by reconciling the two great branches of the natural aristocracy, the capitalists and the landowners, and by so widening the base of the government as to interest in its defence the whole of the middle class, that brave, honest and sound-hearted class, which is as anxious for the maintenance of order and the security of property as it is hostile to corruption and oppression, succeed in averting a struggle to which no rational friend of liberty or of law can look forward without great apprehensions.

Here is the characteristic Victorian alliance between the new middle class of traders and the old landowners—what Matthew Arnold would have called an unholy alliance between Philistines and Barbarians. What of Arnold's third class, the Populace? Their view was expressed a few weeks after the passing of the Reform Bill, in a journal called *The Poor Man's Guardian*, in which the Bill was described as a "damnable delusion, giving us as many tyrants as there are shopkeepers". But to

Macaulay any suggestion of universal suffrage was something to be regarded with pious horror—he was "Liberal in opinion, but no radical".

From 1834 to 1838 Macaulay served as a Member of the Supreme Council of India. The motives which had led him to accept the office were frankly stated in a letter to his sister. His family would be partially dependent upon him; he wished to live like a gentleman and his political activities did not allow him sufficient time to earn a decent living by his pen. In India his salary would be £10,000 per annum, of which he would save half; in five years he would be able to return to England with a snug little fortune of £30,000. Material comfort and security, conditions which were essential to the development of the Victorian mentality, were assured.

"Without a competence," Macaulay wrote to Lord Lansdowne shortly before his departure for India, "it is not very easy for a public man to be honest; it is almost impossible for him to be thought so." But Macaulay was no doubt equally honest in his view of the opportunity which India afforded: "I can scarcely conceive a nobler field", he wrote, "than that which our Indian Empire now presents to a statesman".

Macaulay's Indian years, like all his years, were crowded; and statesmanship and literature are mingled almost inextricably in the record of them. For the voyage he provided himself with Richardson, Voltaire, Gibbon, Sismondi, Davila, *Orlando*

Furioso in Italian, *Don Quixote* in Spanish, Homer in Greek, Horace in Latin. Many a post-Victorian has similarly determined to use the opportunity of a long voyage for the study of this or that great author; the difference between him and Lord Macaulay is that Macaulay actually read the books. Nor was the stream of his productivity abated. The drafting of notes on the Indian Penal Code, of State Papers on the Calcutta Press, of the famous Education Minute still left him time to write the essay on Bacon; and in the margins of his editions of the classics there were to be found the *disjecta membra* of a political diary. Thus, on the first page of Theocritus there was entered a note of Lord W. Bentinck sailing on March 20, 1835; on the last page of the *De Amicitia* a note that Lord Auckland had arrived at Government House and been sworn in on March 5, 1836; beneath an idyll of Moschus a note of Sir Robert Peel being First Lord of the Treasury.

After Macaulay's return to England in 1838, it was not long before he embarked upon the work which was to represent in the fullest sense the application of his literary power to the political story of England. The plan of the *History* is briefly outlined in a letter of July 20, 1838; it is to begin with the Revolution of 1688 and the death of George IV is suggested as the most suitable *terminus ad quem*:

> The History would then be an entire view of all the transactions which took place between the Revolution

which brought the Crown into harmony with the Parliament and the Revolution which brought the Parliament into harmony with the nation.

But the project, ambitious as it was, did not involve any kind of retirement to the "shelter of academic bowers". The work of writing was begun in 1839, the year in which Macaulay re-entered Parliament and became Secretary at War; and it is highly characteristic that Macaulay, a minister in an Early Victorian Whig Cabinet, should have planned his *History* to cover the period in which, as he saw it, the triumph of Whiggery should be progressively displayed. He saw the history of England's past as a great drama in which the heroic parts were played by those who had fought for constitutional liberty not as for the sublime aim of a consistent political theory, but as for a practical good which was essential to an ordered, civilised, and democratic government. "No man", says Cotter Morison, "was ever less of a philosopher or more of a politician than Macaulay. He had an eye to business, not to abstract truth".

But, of course, Macaulay had an eye to a great deal more. What has been called his mastery of *mise-en-scène* made his *History* a kind of revelation to the eager thousands who rushed to buy it — a revelation of the picturesque and dramatic elements in the story of English political progress. Nothing like it had been written before, and Macaulay, like all good artists, knew quite well what he was doing: "There is merit, no doubt,"

he wrote in his Diary, "in Hume, Robertson, Voltaire, and Gibbon. Yet it is not the thing. I have a conception of history more just, I am confident, than theirs." This is not conceit. It is the conscious and confident artistry of the creator of a new literary form. It is exactly the same note as that struck in the previous century by Boswell in relation to biography and by Fielding in relation to fiction.

With a buoyant belief, then, both in his own power of presentation and in the material which English history provided for a graphic record of constitutional progress, Macaulay completed his first two volumes for publication in 1848. The date has a certain significance. It was the year in which nearly every country in Europe had its revolution and in which the Chartists had their meeting for the presentation of their monster petition.

Carlyle's rhetoric became more and more gloomy:

> High shouts of exultation, in every dialect, by every vehicle of speech and writing, rise from far and near over this last avatar of Democracy in 1848; and yet, to wise minds, the first aspect it presents seems rather to be one of boundless misery and sorrow....To the great mass of men, I am aware, the matter presents itself quite on this hopeful side. Democracy they consider to *be* a kind of "Government". The old model, formed long since, and brought to perfection in England now 200 years ago, has proclaimed itself to all Nations as the new healing for every wo.... The contrary of all this is deeply manifest to me...and the farther I look into the roots of all this, the more hateful,

ruinous and dismal does the state of mind all this could have originated in appear to me.

Ruskin was more temperate, but equally solemn:

The aspect of the years that approach us is as solemn as it is full of mystery; and the weight of evil against which we have to contend is increasing like the letting out of water.... The blasphemies of the earth are sounding louder, and its miseries heaped heavier every day....

From these forebodings it is interesting to turn to the famous opening of the Third Chapter of Macaulay's *History*. If Macaulay's belief in Early Victorian civilisation is implicit in all his writings, it is most clearly and concisely explicit in this chapter:

If we would study with profit the history of our ancestors, we must be constantly on our guard against that delusion which the well-known names of families, places, and offices naturally produce, and must never forget that the country of which we read was a very different country from that in which we live. In every experimental science there is a tendency towards perfection. In every human being there is a wish to ameliorate his own condition.... No ordinary misfortune, nor ordinary misgovernment, will do so much to make a nation wretched, as the constant progress of physical knowledge and the constant effort of every man to better himself will do to make a nation prosperous.

There is the word of the true believer in progress, in the effort of the individual to better himself.

It has often been found that profuse expenditure, heavy taxation, absurd commercial restrictions, corrupt tribunals, disastrous wars, seditions, persecu-

tions, conflagrations, inundations, have not been able to destroy capital as fast as the exertions of private citizens have been able to create it.

There is the Victorian faith in *Laissez-faire.*

In consequence partly of our geographical and partly of our moral position, we have, during several generations, been exempt from evils which have elsewhere impeded the efforts and destroyed the fruits of industry.

There is the Victorian pride in insularity—the thankfulness that England is not as other nations are.

Every man has felt entire confidence that the state would protect him in the possession of what has been earned by his diligence and hoarded by his self-denial.

There is the Victorian glorification of self-help. Macaulay had a profound distrust of paternal government, but the State would help those who helped themselves.

Under the benignant influence of peace and liberty, science has flourished and has been applied to practical purposes on a scale never before known. The consequence is that a change to which the history of the old world furnishes no parallel has taken place in our country.

There is the triumphant note of Victorian optimism. It was an age without parallel.

To see a cold shower of scorn poured upon this enthusiastic fire we may turn to the journal of John Mitchel, the Irish agitator, who was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation in this same year 1848. On board ship he read Macaulay's

Essays, for want of something better, as he is careful to add, and in his diary he wrote:

> He is a born Edinburgh Reviewer, this Macaulay, and indeed a type-reviewer—an authentic specimen-page of nineteenth-century literature. He has the right omniscient tone and air and the true knack of administering reverential flattery to British civilization, British prowess, honour, enlightenment, and all that, especially to the great nineteenth century and its astounding civilization, that is, to his readers. It is altogether a new thing in the history of mankind, this triumphant glorification of a current century upon being the century it is. No former age, before Christ or after, ever took any pride in itself and sneered at the wisdom of its ancestors; and the new phenomenon indicates, I believe, not higher wisdom, but deeper stupidity.

This is more frankly brutal criticism than that to which Macaulay was subjected by later Victorians, but the opening pages of the Third Chapter are almost in themselves sufficient to show why Macaulay has been pilloried as the Prince of Philistines. One of his weaknesses was particularly open to attack—his dislike and contempt of abstract speculation. True, he loved Plato, but not chiefly, as his biographer admits, for the sake of Plato's metaphysics. He read the *Republic* with the eyes of a Whig and an Englishman, and his sweeping view of the futility of the ancient philosophers is expressed with characteristic vehemence in the essay on Bacon:

> They promised what was impracticable; they despised what was practicable; they filled the world with

long words and long beards; and they left it as wicked and as ignorant as they found it.

Here, as elsewhere, Macaulay, one of the finest scholars of his time, seems entirely out of sympathy with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. It would, of course, be unfair to maintain that this is a peculiarly Victorian paradox; for in every academic system there is the inherent danger that amongst its prizemen it may produce scholars of wide reading, tenacious memory, and correct expression who may be fundamentally unintellectual. I hope it is not disloyal to add that this is a danger to which Cambridge scholarship, with its fine traditions of soundness and accuracy, is especially liable; I hope similarly that it is not impolite to conjecture that the dangers, which may conceivably be incurred in another place, of brilliant dialectic built upon the sands of imperfect knowledge are dangers greater than those to which the Cambridge man is exposed.

About Macaulay's deficiency in this matter there can be no doubt; and his imagination was similarly limited. This again may sound paradoxical, since critics are agreed, and indeed it is obvious, that no historian has presented the past with greater vividness of effect. But this was the work of a purely historical, not an intellectual, imagination—a power which Macaulay had of visualising an historic scene and depicting it in graphic detail. Local colour was there in abundance, but Macaulay's sense of values was always that of the Whig

optimist. Where his imagination failed was in picturing to himself, even dimly, a world which might have a scale of values entirely different from that of the cultured member of the Victorian civilisation, a world in which the criterion of reality was not applicability to, but independence of, material result, a world in which values were absolute.

It was with this pictorial, unintellectual imagination that Macaulay approached the subject of poetry. It would be unfair, perhaps, to assess his poetical judgment too strictly by the opinions expressed in the essay on Milton. Nevertheless, there is something fundamental in Macaulay's view of poetry as producing an illusion on the eye of the mind, and in the antithesis between the light of knowledge on the one hand and the phantoms of the poet on the other:

> We cannot [he says] unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction.

Reality and deception—the clear-cut division is characteristic. The poet may create beautiful fantasies out of his peculiar imagination, but a breath of solid fact may at any time blow them sky-high. Poetry, unless it be an historical record in verse, is a fairy-tale for grown-ups. What of Macaulay's own poetry? From the time of its publication onwards the collection of *Lays of Ancient Rome* was the Victorian child's guide to poetry. If the Victorian school-boy (the real

school-boy—not the omniscient stripling created by Macaulay in his own image) had never heard anything else about Macaulay, he would at any rate remember the creator of Lars Porsena, of false Sextus, of the ranks of Tuscany, of the good logs of Algidus, of

> The priest who slew the slayer
> And shall himself be slain.

Matthew Arnold's onslaught is, of course, almost as famous as the *Lays* themselves:

> To my mind a man's power to detect the ring of false metal in those Lays is a good measure of his fitness to give an opinion about poetical matters:
>
> To every man upon this earth
> Death cometh soon or late
>
> it is hard to read without a cry of pain.

Well, I repeat, we all read and learnt the lines as children and we probably did so without exclamations of critical anguish.

In certain stanzas, indeed, any one with an elementary critical sense will find the jingle of the sentimental antiphonies almost unbearable:

> Then none was for a party;
> Then all were for the state;
> Then the great man helped the poor,
> And the poor man loved the great.

The even mutuality of rich and poor is like the ceremony of "setting-to-partners" in a Victorian set of Lancers.

On the other hand:

> And nearer fast and nearer
> Doth the red whirlwind come;
> And louder still and still more loud,
> From underneath that rolling cloud,
> Is heard the trumpet's war-note proud,
> The trampling, and the hum.
> And plainly and more plainly
> Now through the gloom appears,
> Far to left and far to right,
> In broken gleams of dark-blue light,
> The long array of helmets bright,
> The long array of spears.

That is vivid and descriptive verse conveying exactly what the writer means to convey in rapid and appropriate language.

For myself, I believe that the truest word about the *Lays*, as about some other matters, has been said by Mr Saintsbury:

> They have the special merit that liking for them will mature into liking for greater poetry still. The *Lays* in a certain, and only a certain sense, may be milk for babes; but good milk is a great deal better than tainted meat and unsound wine.

Side by side in the collection of Macaulay's miscellaneous poems may be found two astonishing pieces:

> By those white cliffs I never more must see,
> By that dear language which I spake like thee,
> Forget all feuds, and shed one English tear
> O'er English dust. A broken heart lies here.

If any one still believes that the heroic couplet is an inadequate medium for emotional expression,

let him read the *Epitaph on a Jacobite*, the *tour de force* of a Victorian Whig. The other piece, *The Last Buccaneer*, may seem at first sight just another experiment in the manner of the ballad; but something more is here:

> From St Jago's wealthy port, from Havannah's royal fort,
> The seaman goes forth without fear:
> For since that stormy night not a mortal hath had sight
> Of the flag of the last Buccaneer.

Reality and deception—In which world are we? Is the last Buccaneer more, or less, real than Lars Porsena?

But as an influence upon Victorian taste, Macaulay the essayist was even more powerful than Macaulay the historian or Macaulay the poet. It is doubtful indeed whether any collection of essays has had a greater effect upon the critical standards of ordinary English readers than had Macaulay's, both for his own and for succeeding generations.

The most notorious example, perhaps, is that of his treatment of Boswell and Johnson. Macaulay, an artist himself, gave Boswell's artistic triumph its proper praise:

> Homer is not more decidedly the first of heroic poets, Shakespeare is not more decidedly the first of dramatists, Demosthenes is not more decidedly the first of orators, than Boswell is the first of biographers. He has no second. He has distanced all his competitors so decidedly, that it is not worth while to place them. Eclipse is first, and the rest nowhere.

So far, so good. But when Macaulay begins to contemplate Boswell the Man, what does he find? He finds to his horror, the horror of the enthusiastic Victorian, that Boswell was a man of no academic distinction, a man who was frequently tipsy and frequently involved in disreputable love-affairs, a man—but why feebly try to paraphrase Macaulay himself?

> Servile and impertinent, shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot, bloated with family pride and eternally blustering about the dignity of a born gentleman, yet stooping to be a tale-bearer, an eavesdropper, a common butt in the taverns of London.

Macaulay, the great master of picturesque antithesis, is faced with an antithesis which he cannot explain—and then comes his astonishing attempt at a solution:

> Other great writers [he says], Goldsmith, for instance, had their weaknesses, but these men attained literary eminence in spite of their weaknesses. Boswell attained it by reason of his weaknesses. If he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer.

Thus was born the famous "inspired idiot" theory of James Boswell. To-day, perhaps, it is almost unnecessary to refute such a fantastic *lucus a non lucendo*. Macaulay's essay was indeed soon followed by a juster estimate of Boswell made by Thomas Carlyle, but it was Macaulay's view which determined the Victorian attitude towards Boswell's achievement. Such was the vogue of the *Essays* that it was almost literally true that every

Victorian school-boy knew something of the essay on Boswell's Johnson. The tragedy was that, until quite recently, it was often the only thing about Boswell that he did know.

To Johnson himself Macaulay did a greater measure of justice. But here again the kind of emphasis which Macaulay laid on Johnson's oddity of bearing, his table manners, his slovenly dress, his misery in Grub Street, his dismissal by Mrs Thrale, did much to conventionalise the Victorian view of the Great Lexicographer. It was left for the late Sir Walter Raleigh and other critics to restore the true perspective of the Johnson picture, not only by a fresh study of Boswell, but by a revaluation of Johnson's own work as scholar and critic.

Another essay which reveals in a special sense the Victorian attitude towards literature is that which treats of the Comic Dramatists of the Restoration. At once Macaulay was faced with the questions of decency and morality.

> The plays to which he [*i.e.* Leigh Hunt] now acts as introducer are, with few exceptions, such as, in the opinion of many very respectable people, ought not to be reprinted. In this opinion we can by no means concur. We cannot wish that any work or class of works which has exercised a great influence on the human mind, and which illustrates the character of an important epoch in letters, politics and morals, should disappear from the world. If we err in this matter, we err with the gravest men and bodies of men in the empire and especially with the Church of England and with the great schools of learning which are connected

with her....The Athenian Comedies in which there are scarcely a hundred lines together without some passage of which Rochester would have been ashamed, have been reprinted at the Pitt Press and the Clarendon Press under the direction of syndics and delegates appointed by the Universities and have been illustrated with notes by reverend, very reverend, and right reverend commentators.

Macaulay had the common sense to see that a student who was allowed to read Aristophanes and Catullus must not be debarred from *The Country Wife* and *The Way of the World*. Even decency must modify its claims when faced with the honest demands of scholarship. But what was inadmissible and indeed incomprehensible by Macaulay was that the characters in Restoration Comedy should be judged, as Lamb claimed, as inhabitants of a region where "no cold moral reigned".

The question [wrote Macaulay] is simply this, whether a man of genius who constantly and systematically endeavours to make this sort of character [*i.e.* the town-rake, the woman of the town] attractive by uniting it with beauty, grace, dignity, spirit, a high social position, popularity, literature, wit, taste, knowledge of the world, brilliant success in every undertaking, does or does not make an ill use of his powers. We own that we are unable to understand how this question can be answered in any way but one.

There is the triumphant Victorian conclusion. Whether Macaulay or Charles Lamb is right is not the immediate question. The point is rather that nowhere do we find the Victorian view expressed with such magnificent confidence and certainty as

in the pages of Macaulay. In his belief in the Abolition of Slavery, in *Laissez-faire*, in Constitutional Democracy, and in the other principles of Victorian Liberalism, Macaulay was very far from standing alone. But not many in his own, or in later generations, could rise to such a certainty of moral and political conviction. Many of the questions which are ranged under the head of Life, or Art, or Being (questions which tend to acquire a speculative or even a metaphysical character) held no interest for Macaulay. But of those questions which did interest him he was commonly able to say and to feel that he could not understand how they could be answered in any way but one.

Happy are the people who have no doubts, even if they purchase their certainty at the expense of imagination. Macaulay had no doubts—even about the Great Exhibition of 1851:

> Everything was exhilarating and the temper of the multitude the best possible....There is just as much chance of a revolution in England as of the falling of the moon. I made my way into the building; a most gorgeous sight; vast; graceful; beyond the dreams of the Arabian romances. I cannot think that the Caesars ever exhibited a more splendid spectacle.

There at the heart of Victorian splendour let us leave the figure of Lord Macaulay—serene, successful, pre-eminent.

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